

cineACTION



EXILES AND EMIGRÉS

Lang
Hitchcock
Ophuls
Tourneur
Kubrick

NO. 52 \$7 CDN \$6 US



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THE COLLECTIVE

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FRONT COVER

Publicity still from *M*

BACK COVER

Alfred Hitchcock and
Montgomery Clift
on the set of *I Confess*



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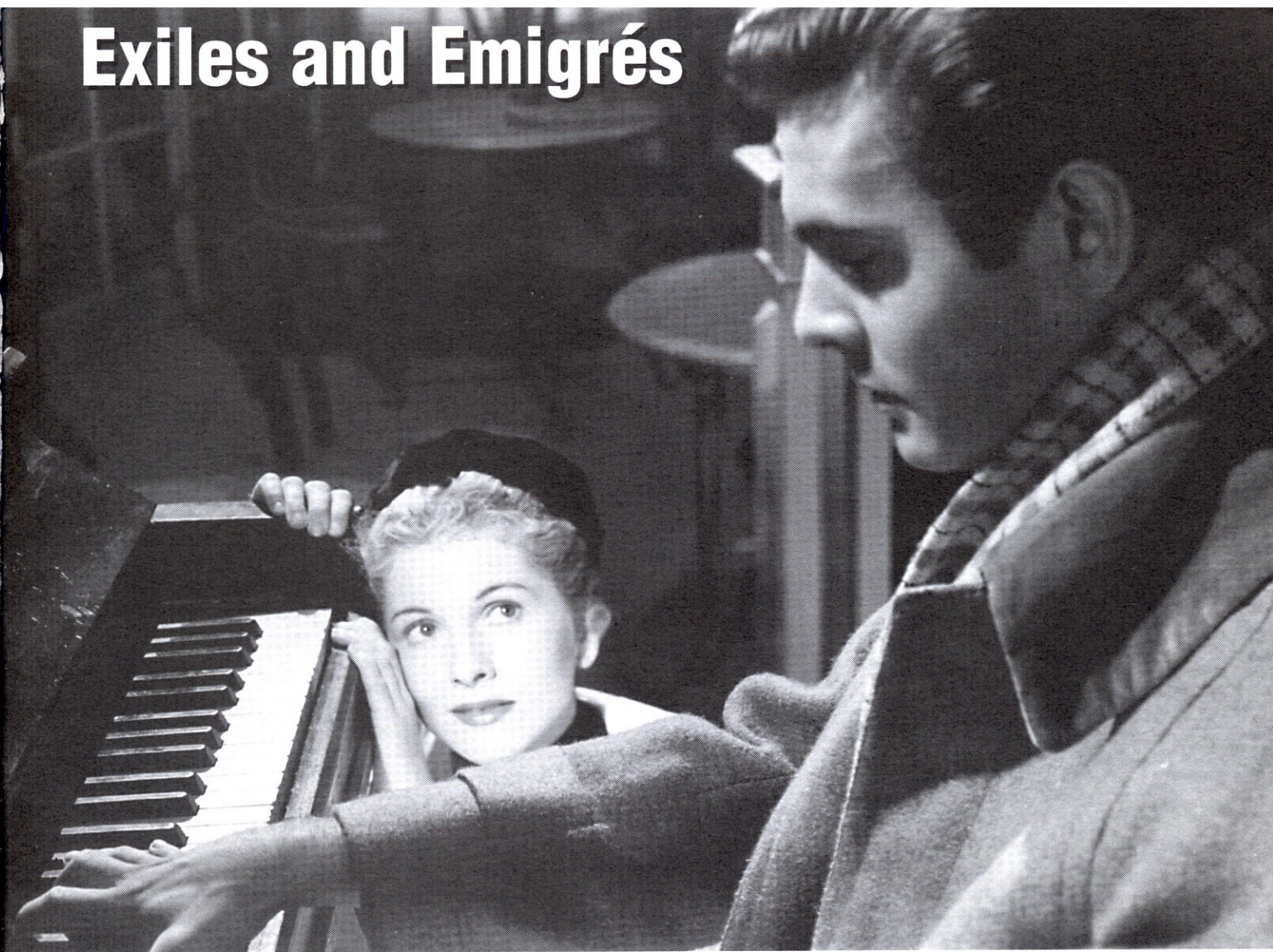
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Exiles and Emigrés



Ophuls in Hollywood: *Letter from an Unknown Woman*

The theme of this issue, as the following articles illustrate, can be addressed within a wide range of contexts. There are multiple reasons for filmmakers working outside of their place of origin. In the silent cinema era, for example, established European talents such as F.W. Murnau, Ernst Lubitsch and Mauritz Stiller were courted by the Hollywood studios. On the other hand, during this same period, a beginning British filmmaker, Alfred Hitchcock, and the already highly acclaimed Sternberg, both traveled to Germany to shoot films.

The greatest period of emigration to Hollywood occurred in the 1930s with the rise of Fascism abroad and the gradual realization within the European film community that personal freedom and self-expression were no longer possible. A wide range of film artists including directors, actors, musicians and writers fled Europe, and many ended up settling permanently in America; these artists often brought a distinct aesthetic sensibility and social consciousness to a mainstream cinema which had a strongly pronounced ideological mandate. Some directors, such as Max Ophuls and Jean Renoir, while producing noteworthy works in Hollywood, never fully acclimatized to the studio system and returned to Europe after the Second World War.

By the late 1940s and early 1950s, with the Cold War and

the rise of McCarthyism, American filmmakers such as the left leaning Joseph Losey and John Berry were forced to emigrate to Europe. Perhaps the most notorious instance occurred in 1947 when Bertholt Brecht, after being called to testify by the House of UnAmerican Activities Committee, fled the country the next day.

In the last forty years the concept of exile and emigré artists has changed dramatically as filmmaking has become a more globalized industry, as national borders have shifted, as the structure of production and distribution has been transformed.

A discussion of exile and emigré filmmakers shows that the development of cinematic practice is at once specific to the culture and national context within which the work was produced, but also that the history of the cinema from its inception has been shaped by international contributions which forbid reducing a film's 'meaning' simply to its immediate cultural context.

The articles in this issue acknowledge the richness that can result from the mix of creative talent and collaborative energies which inform the finest achievements of the cinema.

Florence Jacobowitz

Richard Lippe



All That Heaven Allows: Russell Metty, Agnes Moorhead, Douglas Sirk, Jane Wyman, Rock Hudson, Ross Hunter and Jack Daniels

Douglas Sirk

1900–1987

The year 2000 marks the centenary of Douglas Sirk, and given the theme of this issue on exiles and emigrés, it seems appropriate to acknowledge and celebrate Sirk's contributions to the cinema. Like a number of major directors — Alfred Hitchcock, Fritz Lang, Otto Preminger, Max Ophüls, to name a few—Sirk's career is rooted in the European modernist movements of the 1920s. German Expressionism in particular was a seminal influence in its emphasis on how style expresses an internal subjectivity, the importance of tone and mood, the placement of character motivation within a broader determined context. Sirk arrived in America in 1938, with a solid career behind him. He had studied with Erwin Panofsky, trained in the theatre and directed numerous plays both classical and contemporary before moving into the German film industry in 1934. His cosmopolitan background, experience with circumventing Nazi censorship while at Ufa and his gravitation toward melodrama as a means of veiling direct social criticism, served him well later in Hollywood.

Sirk's work in the German theatre and his left-leaning politics exposed him to the theories and plays of politicized artists like Bertolt Brecht. The influence of Brecht and his concept of epic theatre is apparent in Sirk's American films, particularly in the notion that mass entertainment can didactically reveal the social conditions which determine human

behaviour. Sirk's Hollywood films can be seen as a form of epic cinema: they simultaneously entertain and critically observe Eisenhower America, and they foreground style as commentary.

Sirk's reputation as a major filmmaker began with the *Cahiers du Cinéma* New Wave critics—especially Godard's writings were perceptive and impassioned; in the 1970s, the British school of film theory and criticism exemplified in *Screen* magazine continued to draw attention to the director's work. *Screen* concentrated on Sirk's identity as a politicized artist who transcended the pervasive capitalist-bourgeois ideology which they argued was intrinsic to Hollywood realism. Jon Halliday's authoritative interview book, *Sirk on Sirk*, first published through the BFI in 1972, demonstrated Sirk's identity as an articulate leftist intellectual who understood and appreciated film and its usage as a mass medium. Sirk's articulate responses to Halliday's questions about his goals as a politically motivated filmmaker evidence the director's intentionality to make films which would disrupt and disturb the contemporary audience. Coming soon after the publication of *Sirk on Sirk*, Rainer Werner Fassbinder's tribute to Sirk as an acknowledged influence sealed the director's cachet with film critics in North America.

While Sirk's political insights and ability to use the

Hollywood cinema as a medium to produce critical art are certainly remarkable, so was his keen understanding of the mechanics of the industry, especially in terms of star and genre. Unlike a number of European emigré directors who found the working conditions of the factory-like system of Hollywood oppressive, Sirk was able to acclimatize and use it intelligently to serve his needs. At Universal International studio, he was fortunate to work with two producers, Ross Hunter and Albert Zugsmith, who gave him the opportunity to explore his aesthetic and political interests. Zugsmith is credited for allowing Sirk, with *Written on the Wind* and *The Tarnished Angels*, to make his most audacious films. The collaborations with Hunter, though less flamboyant, are to be equally valued. Films like *All That Heaven Allows*, *There's Always Tomorrow* and *A Time to Love and a Time to Die* are delicately nuanced, subtly ironic works with a strong critical edge. And *Taza, Son of Cochise* and *Captain Lightfoot*, which were produced by Hunter, indicate that the director-producer team might productively further explore genres other than the melodrama.

Despite the substantial body of work Sirk produced in Europe before emigrating, the director's status as an important filmmaker depends (unlike, for example, Hitchcock and Lang) significantly on his Hollywood films, especially those made at Universal International in the 1950s. Though Sirk worked independently when he first arrived, it wasn't until he was put under a long term contract that he was able to utilize the full potential of the studio system. Aside from the above mentioned producers, Sirk collaborated regularly at the studio with a team of exceptional talents including Russell Metty (photography), Alexander Golitzen (art direction) and Frank Skinner (music).

Sirk's understanding of a star's iconic presence is evident in

his use of stars with previously established careers, such as Barbara Stanwyck, Jane Wyman and Lana Turner. He was equally adept however at creatively using a young Rock Hudson, shaping as well as refining the actor's masculine image, taking advantage of his innate sensitivity and vulnerability. Hudson became a major star as a result of his work with the director and, arguably, he never again achieved the complexity that his films with Sirk display. Sirk also elevated minor stars like Robert Stack and Dorothy Malone, eliciting from them the best performances of their careers, performances which rank with the great acting achievements of the 1950s cinema. *Imitation of Life* depends on the acting talents of the relatively unknown Juanita Moore and Susan Kohner; but the film equally draws from the iconic presence of Lana Turner as contrast, to construct its thematic about performance and identity.

Thomas Elsaesser's seminal article ("Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama") considers the aesthetic use of style as meaning, commenting, for example, on the enamelled surfaces and use of colour and sound in *Written on the Wind*. The discussion of aesthetics, however, has by no means been exhausted. There is work to be done on Sirk's remarkable ability to create politically subversive films that remain engaging and vital, and manifest their own intrinsic beauty. These films address the viewer emotionally and intellectually and demand engagement through a layered and complex use of aesthetics and filmic conventions. In the true spirit of Brecht, Sirk's films astonish as well as educate and, in the spirit of the Hollywood cinema, they were made for the public who embraced them.

Florence Jacobowitz

Richard Lippe

The Tarnished Angels



LANG and BRECHT

by Robin Wood

It is not clear to me just how well Lang knew Berthold Brecht: there is evidence that they met in Germany, but they collaborated only once, in Hollywood (*Hangmen Also Die*, 1943), and Brecht disowned the result. Yet I have the sense that Lang's work (at least from 1931 onward) owes more to Brechtian theory and practice than has been generally recognized. Only one film is fully and rigorously 'Brechtian' on every level, but that one (*M*, 1931) is certainly among his greatest, and indeed is considered by many his masterpiece. Yet I find traces of Brecht's influence (invariably beneficial) in many of the Hollywood films, and especially in the finest of them. Another way of stating this would be to posit not so much a direct, consciously cultivated, influence, as Lang's discovery of an affinity of aim and outlook.

I must confess to having no great interest in the two American films in which one would expect this influence to be most apparent. *Hangmen Also Die* I find surprisingly and disappointingly dull, weighed down by too many uninteresting actors (Gene Lockhart's is its one memorable performance); and the film with the most obvious Brechtianisms, *You and Me* (1938)—didactic songs, the explicit use of lecture, complete with blackboard and chalk, to point a lesson—bafflingly uses these most superficial of Brecht's devices in the service of a safely capitalist moral, teaching criminals to be good citizens and obey the law, because that way they will make more money. (I feel very uneasy about this film: is there a level of irony that I have missed? Is the use of these Brechtian flourishes itself intended as ironic? The film could work like that only for the most intellectually sophisticated of viewers, which was scarcely one of Brecht's intentions).

Too much emphasis, in fact, has been placed on the obvious Brechtian devices, rather than on the underlying aims and impulses they were elaborated to express. It is possible to argue that they do not represent the *only* means by which those aims can find expression; it is also possible to argue that they are more appropriate to theatre than to cinema. The aims—the *essence* of Brecht—should be



Peter Lorre in *M*

familiar enough, but it seems necessary to reiterate them here. Their basic premise is the hatred of capitalism and the denunciation of the manifold miseries it has produced: its emphasis on competition (rather than cooperation); its elevation of material wealth as the dominant human need; the resulting implicit endorsement and encouragement of greed and possessiveness as the essence of human desire; the setting not merely of class against class but of individual against individual, resulting in massive exaggeration of the drive to dominate, hence in the destruction of positive human relations. Arising directly from this premise is the necessity of challenging and radically transforming the characteristics of the dominant capitalist fictions (most directly theatre, as that was the area within which Brecht worked, but by implication the novel and the cinema). Brecht saw those characteristics (correctly enough, though art is never as monolithic as this may seem to imply) as an important part of the machinery with which capitalism keeps its subjects in a condition of chronic mystification, 'realism' (the creation of the *illusion* of reality) consequently being the chief focus of attack. 'Realism' held its spectators at the level of the individual: though the existence of problems was of course acknowledged (without them how could there be drama?), the problems were not with 'the system', the rightness of which was a given, but arose from 'human' (rather than culturally produced) needs and drives, which could be resolved (not *necessarily* happily, though the 'happy end' was the commonest conclusion) without any need for social/political change (beyond, perhaps, a superficial reform or two, as in the typical Hollywood 'social problem' movie).

The basis of Brecht's response to this was the substitution of critical distance for full involvement in the fiction and identification with its characters. Essentially, audiences should be encouraged to become aware of the social conditions (and their political underpinnings) within which the characters were trapped: the desire for change would therefore no longer operate at a merely personal level (the desire that a 'bad' character should learn to be 'good,' for example, or that the erring woman should accept her destiny as a good wife and mother), but at the social/political level, the desire to transform the very basis of the culture. The use of obvious anti-realist devices (songs, placards with slogans or commentaries, didactic messages) to interrupt the action was only the most blatant means to this end, and if *You and Me* has a message for us it is perhaps that they can be used quite easily for directly opposite purposes. Far more important is the underlying principle, the famous *verfremdungseffekt*, 'making the familiar strange', formally translated as 'alienation', now more commonly thought of as 'distanciation' (since an alienated audience would simply leave the theatre).

Two final points before I pass on to actual films: 1. Brecht's theatre is scarcely lacking in awareness of the subjection and oppression of women, but his primary emphasis, as a Marxist of that period, was inevitably on class politics. While by no means wishing to minimize the continuing importance of this, I feel that today, since the women's movement of the 1960s/70s, sexual politics should be allowed equal weight (not forgetting the manifold connections between the two). 2. I remain extremely sceptical of the widely touted belief (since Brecht has been assimilated to Barthes *et. al.*) that *all* realist narratives are by definition reactionary.

Take, as one of the more obvious instances, *Boys Don't Cry*. There is nothing in the least Brechtian or deconstructionist about the film, unless one argues that a film whose heroine is pretending throughout to be male is inherently 'making the familiar strange', but that is in the subject-matter, its treatment being unapologetically 'realist' from beginning to end. Yet it is difficult to see how the film could be read as merely endorsing the gender *status quo*.

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NOTE: Various versions of *M* appear to be in circulation. What follows is based on the recently restored version available on the Criterion DVD, almost exactly ten minutes longer than the version on the earlier laserdisc, which omits (aside from the dubious ending in court, which may have been added against Lang's wishes) the startling scene in which Beckert, before a mirror, grotesquely distorts his own face by pulling at the corners of his mouth. Why prints exist without what is among the film's most unforgettable moments is a question. Is it possible that Lang himself had doubts about it, attracted by the idea of not allowing us to see Beckert's face at all until the day of his capture?

M was made in the same year as Pabst's version of *The Threepenny Opera*, usually seen as Brecht's 'official' entry into cinema (though Brecht himself was unimpressed); Lang's film seems to me the more rigorously and *effectively* Brechtian of the two. Here at least one can surely posit a direct influence, Brecht being so much 'in the air' in Germany at that time, and the influence is profound, operating at all levels, influencing the film's meaning, structure and style without recourse to the more obvious (and essentially theatrical) devices. The film might be said to be built upon Brecht's more fundamental structuring principles of distanciation (interruption, juxtaposition, irony), in the service of the critical analysis of capitalism. And for once there is little question as to the attribution of authorship: Lang controlled the film at every stage, constructing the scenario ('...from an article by Egon Jacobson') with his then wife, Thea von Harbou.

Let me dispose at once of the film's solitary use of what I have characterized as the more superficial Brechtianisms, the explicit and obtrusive drawing attention to 'film as film': the moment shortly after the introduction of the beggars where one of them covers his ears in agony at the sound of another beggar's out-of-tune barrel organ and Lang abruptly cuts off the soundtrack, restoring it when the beggar removes his hands. One might I suppose argue that one such moment is necessary at some point in the film to undermine the 'reality-effect' of the realist text. I find it more jarring than distancing, but it does no lasting harm. The film's more authentically Brechtian characteristics are pervasive, affecting our reading of every sequence.

Lang systematically reduces the possibility of audience identification (a tendency more intrinsic to cinema than to theatre, and perhaps impossible to eradicate totally in a narrative film—but did Brecht ever want to eradicate identification *totally*?) to the absolute minimum: our only possible identification figures (at least until the climax) are the mothers and the children, all of whom are presented as completely helpless within the power structure, acted upon but never acting. The film resolutely refuses to provide the audience

with a reliable (or even unreliable!) hero-figure, or with any reassuring resolution.

Most people, when *M* is mentioned, identify it immediately (and accurately enough) as 'the film about the serial killer of children', and go on to praise (quite rightly) Peter Lorre's extraordinary performance. Yet Lang does not allow us to see his face (aside from the single shot of Beckert before the mirror referred to above) until slightly more than forty minutes into the film, and for by far the greater part of that forty minutes he is entirely off screen; in only one other scene are we allowed a closer and more prolonged view of him (the scene in which he writes his letter to the press), and there Lang cuts between a medium close-up of the back of his head and shoulders and a close-up of the letter. The first fifteen minutes establish the principle of interruption/juxtaposition in strictly cinematic terms, with three quite distinct sequences employing three quite distinct filmic modes: the opening 'suspense' sequence (in which we know from the outset what is going to happen) of the murder of Elsie Beckmann (offscreen, signified by the rolling ball and the balloon caught on telegraph wires); a series of three serio-comic, absurdist vignettes in which various men are arbitrarily identified as the killer and assaulted; and a lengthy documentary-with-voiceover detailing the thoroughness of the police investigation. Only the first of the three sequences introduces a 'permanent' character in the narrative, and then only in long-shot glimpses or as a shadow falling over a poster offering a reward for information about the serial killer.

The opening 'suspense' sequence is quite unlike any other that comes to mind. For most of it, instead of following the trajectory of stalker and victim (as in more conventional monster or serial killer movies) we are kept in the apartment with Elsie's mother as she takes in her laundry from a helpful neighbour, performs odd jobs of housework (the apartment is scrupulously clean, despite the obvious poverty), then (when the clock strikes midday) lovingly prepares her daughter's lunch. We assume, I think, that she is a widow: there is no sense of a male presence, and all her devotion clearly gravitates to her only child. Until the film's climax it is the only sequence in which our strongest emotions of pity and terror are activated, and they are divided between parent and child, Lang taking pains to eliminate as far as possible all reference to merely *physical* horror, and compelling us (by his concentration on the mother's situation and actions) to *think* as much as *feel*.

The documentary about the police dovetails neatly into the police raid and round-up of criminals, significantly in a cellar (establishing the underworld/overworld opposition that runs through Lang's work from the first to the last Mabuse films, or from *Metropolis* to *The Tiger of Eschnapur*). This establishes at once the overbearing, dictatorial figure of Lohmann, the chief of police, and (by also establishing the need of the criminals to track down the killer, who is interfering with their pursuits by disturbing the *status quo*) leads in turn to the supremely Brechtian series of intercut scenes paralleling criminals and police, as each set plans its strategies. The parallels are intricate and detailed, but three are dominant: both are structured and stratified *organizations*, hierarchies each with an unpleasant dictatorial figure (Lohmann, Schranker) at its head; both are presented—visually and dramatically—in terms of 'round table' discussions

(the criminals' table is *literally* round) dominated by the chief; and their diverse solutions of the crimes (the discovery that Beckert is the killer) are simultaneous (though it is important that neither organization actually traps him). Fundamentally, both are quintessentially *capitalist* organizations, with money as the ultimate sanction: the police are the preservers and defenders of the capitalist *status quo*, the criminals work within it, as a business organization, for financial gain. The film suggests, indeed, that the criminal underworld is not merely the inevitable product of capitalism but is necessary to its stability (as well as to the very existence of a police force), suggesting in its turn that capitalism itself is a form of socially legitimated organized crime, the wealthy stealing the fruits of the workers' labour. (Is it necessary to point out that organized crime still flourishes in capitalist society, scarcely interfered with by the police beyond the occasional token arrest?).

At the bottom of the pecking order are the beggars, capitalism's lowest of the low, its ultimate victims, and it is they who ultimately track and trap Beckert. They are connected to the criminal underworld, since they answer to it and include criminals amongst their numbers (for example the beggar who feigns blindness his sight leading him to suspect the wrong man, contrasted with the genuinely blind beggar who is primarily responsible for identifying Beckert through sound, one of the film's many nicely understated minor ironies). Without the beggars, the criminals would be as helpless as the police. They also represent a quite different form of organization: a network rather than a hierarchy, its members working in conjunction but without the domination of a 'boss': the film's nearest approach to an image of a 'collective'.

At the heart of it all, of course, is Beckert, for whom alone the film is superficially (but quite understandably) remembered by those who saw it long ago: certainly, Lorre's performance etches itself indelibly in the memory. Aside from that one mirror shot we are not allowed to see him until his last day of 'freedom', and Lang immediately establishes that Beckert is never free: although on some level, or at certain times, he is fully aware of what he does and of its monstrousness, it is clear that he is as much victim (of his own uncontrollable drives) as predator. We see him looking idly in a shop window (the camera inside, watching him). The window, when we see its contents fully, contains two clear mechanical/electrical signifiers of obsession: the arrow pointing repeatedly, obstinately downward, the endlessly repeating spiralling light fixture. When a little girl stands beside him we see, in quick succession, his attraction, his effort at control, his surrender. The 'obsession' motif is resumed, even more pointedly, when they look together in another shop window, at the top of which we see the lower body of a wooden puppet, its legs jerking rhythmically and clumsily, controlled by an unseen mechanism. Beckert's intermittent self-awareness is dramatized in his signature-tune, the 'troll' awareness is dramatized in his signature-tune, the 'troll' theme ('In the Hall of the Mountain King') from Grieg's incidental music to *Peer Gynt*, which he automatically whistles as soon as he is 'set off' (and continues to whistle in his frustration, as he tries to drown his desires in cognac): he knows that, mentally, he is a hideous, misshapen monster. This sense of his helplessness is the first step in Lang's ultimate audacity: producing a child murderer as a (qualified of course) audience-identification figure, the only one the film

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has offered us since the mother of the opening segment.

For no character is a surer magnet for identification than one who is helpless, persecuted, terrified, and in danger of an imminent and ugly death at the hands of an enraged mob. Obviously we can never lose our sense of Beckert's monstrousness, our awareness that he is guilty of the foulest crimes known to humanity—which is what makes the identification so painful, so uniquely disturbing. But there is another, profoundly Brechtian, reason why the identification is so important: Beckert is the only *active* character in the entire film (the females, both adult and child, being essentially passive—acted upon rather than acting) whose actions are not motivated by money. Beckert, arguably the culture's ultimate victim (unless one believes people are 'born like that') is in some sense, on some level, a Brechtian hero because he is the film's one disturber of the capitalist *status quo*, explicitly recognized as such by the underworld. One brilliant, unstressed stroke: Beckert's hiding place is an attic filled with junk (the detritus of capitalism) situated above business offices whose ground floor foundation is a savings bank.

All this is preparation for the supremely Brechtian climactic sequence: the mock trial of Beckert by the underworld, in the ruined building of a bankrupt distillery. We expected to see Beckert torn limb from limb by a lynch mob; instead we are given a parody of the justice system, capitalism's sacred rite of legality and morality. Is it any less fair than Beckert's actual trial (which we are not allowed to witness) will be? At least he won't be lynched. But would that be worse than our culture's grotesque ritual of legal execution, or even than a lifetime spent in an insane asylum? No one at any point in the film asks *why* Beckert is what he is, or how the culture might be radically restructured to prevent the recurrence of such phenomena. (Today everyone asks the first question, but seldom the second).

Of the tacked on ending I have little to say. After the hand on Beckert's shoulder and 'In the name of the law' it is somewhat anticlimactic. The shot of the judges taking their places is not exactly reassuring. It is good, perhaps, to end on the mothers, but not to have them saying that they must watch their children more closely: it smacks too much of the typical liberal-bourgeois (non-) solution, giving the audience a trite answer to questions the film has shown to be unanswerable within the existing social organization.

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Hollywood cinema has been most frequently theorized as the ultimate stronghold of illusionist fiction, its codes and conventions elaborated as a means of locking the spectator inexorably into a process from which there is no possible escape, the goal of which is the resolution of all problems, typically in the construction of the 'good' heterosexual couple, promising marriage, family and the socio-economic *status quo*. An indispensable by-product of such theorizing has been the demotion (even annihilation) of the individual author, reduced at best to a kind of automaton who may leave a few stylistic traces but is ultimately doomed to be a mere cog in the machinery. In practice, it is the individual artist who exposes this as the nonsense it is (it may do well enough for the nondescript 'average product' on the mass manufacture of which Hollywood has partly depended).

If the theory held water, Brecht and Hollywood would be totally incompatible, any relationship being one of pure mutual hostility. And one may concede that it is broadly true that any relationship could not be an easy one, it not being in the nature of vast capitalist enterprises to welcome with open arms concepts like distanciation and subversion, or the systematic exposure of the monstrousness of the existing social structure and its prevailing ideology. The chink in the armour is the very obvious fact that the Hollywood 'system' of codes, plot constructions, conventions, shooting methods, although elaborated to create illusions, is the most artificial imaginable: anti-Hollywood films like *L'Avventura*, *Viaggio in Italia*, and even *A Bout de Souffle* construct a far more plausible illusion of 'reality' than any films by Hawks, Hitchcock, McCarey, Minnelli or Ford, and are consequently far more difficult to perceive as 'constructs'. One can argue that Hollywood has nefariously accustomed us so thoroughly to its artificiality that we mistake its patent illusionism for 'reality' (personally I doubt this), but even then the fact remains that such artificiality requires only minimal heightening to draw our attention to its workings and make the familiar very strange indeed. *Scarlet Street* can stand as an object-lesson in such heightening.

On its release, *Scarlet Street* was generally received as a close companion-piece for its predecessor *Woman in the Window*, and by many critics as Lang's apology for the 'mistake' of that film's catch ending ('It was all a dream...'). The films are linked only by their three stars and by a very superficial plot resemblance; in tone and address they are quite distinct. *Woman in the Window* might be not unfairly described as a highly polished, engrossing and intelligent entertainment—in which context its surprise ending (very well prepared if one attends closely to the opening sequence) seems to me entirely acceptable. *Scarlet Street* is much more than that. I would hesitate to call the film 'Brechtian' exactly (Brecht himself would probably not have recognized it as such), but it manifests a number of features (both stylistic and thematic) that can be argued to demonstrate the possible compatibility, in the right hands, of Hollywood cinema with Brechtian practice.

Crucial to Brecht is a fundamental distinction between 'representation' and 'presentation': the former is the mode of 'realist' fictions, the realism of the representation being commonly mistaken for 'reality', and thereby masking the true reality of social structures; the latter 'presents' reality—the social structures that define it—in such a way as to draw attention to them. The Hollywood film, with its inherent artifice and stylization, although its reiterated modes become so familiar that they can be mistaken for a representation of 'reality', lends itself readily to presentational art, through the use of heightening, exaggeration, contradiction, irony...

It is from this viewpoint that I want (somewhat schematically) to examine *Scarlet Street*.

One may indicate first two major areas of contradiction, nationality and genre:

Nationality

A Hollywood movie with familiar American stars and supporting players, set in New York, was adapted from a French play (*La Chienne*, previously filmed by Renoir). Despite the setting, the accents, the often slangy dialogue, the film every-

where displays its 'Europeanity', which Lang appears to relish rather than attempt to conceal. Its sexual mores (and, despite many concessions to the prevailing censorship, its unusual frankness about them) belong to France rather than to Hollywood: no one can doubt that Kitty /Joan Bennett is a prostitute (and, subsequently and simultaneously, a 'kept woman'), that Johnny/Dan Duryea lives off her earnings, and that her obsession with him is purely sexual, with a strong ingredient of sado-masochism (he beats her up and exploits her, she accepts this almost without protest). The result is a continuous sense of dislocation, a faint but indelible impression of unreality.

Genre

The dominant classification is clearly melodrama, but the film repeatedly shows signs of toppling over into farce and could easily, with a few obvious alterations and a happy ending, have been played as such: witness, for example, the protracted scene of mutual misconceptions in the bar, just after the initial meeting of Chris/Edward G. Robinson and Kitty, or the moment when Kitty registers that Johnny is passing her off as the artist of Chris's paintings, a moment actually played as comedy and perhaps the only moment in this pervasively disturbing film where the spectator is tempted to laugh out loud. The spectator's continuous discomfort is intensified by the uncertainty as to whether to laugh at or pity the film's protagonists, the generic hesitation contributing to 'making the familiar strange' and distancing the spectator from full involvement.

The use of exaggeration follows on from this. The near-farical pitch of the film is dependent upon Lang's presentation of the characters as extreme 'types', becoming 'rounded' characterizations only as the film progresses. Chris and Kitty in the bar verge on the absurd: he is so naive that he appears almost idiotic, she so transparently manipulative and calculating that it seems impossible anyone would be taken in. The precarious credibility of each characterization depends of course on the other: only a Chris could be duped by such a Kitty. Lang and his marvellous actors walk a very dangerous tightrope here, almost daring the spectator to dismiss the film's very premise as ridiculous. The audacity is essential: Lang's project demands that full identification with any one character be impossible, our experience of the film's thematic depending upon our involvement in the tragicomic *interaction* that leads relentlessly to disaster for all three. Interestingly, what would seem to have been the most extreme instance of exaggeration was cut from the film (though its evidence remains in a surviving still): a scene of Chris actually climbing a telegraph pole in an attempt to watch Johnny's execution in the electric chair. Its removal was perhaps wise: its inclusion might finally have destroyed the already dangerously narrow distinction between 'laughing with' and 'laughing at', and Chris's greedily gloating question to the reporters on the train ('What time do they throw the switch?') is arguably sufficient.

The film's dominant mode is the ironic, and irony is inherently distancing. It pervades *Scarlet Street* from beginning to end, ranging from the blatant (the record of 'Melancholy Baby' that sticks on the words 'in love', becoming one of the film's leitmotifs) to the subtle (the sign with which Chris lures Adele's presumed-dead husband into the

apartment—two vertical strokes of the flashlight followed by two horizontal—is the 'double cross'). It is sometimes the overt irony of a character ('Paint me, Chris. They'll be masterpieces'), sometimes the irony of the film (Chris's shame-faced acknowledgement that he has never mastered 'perspective' referring to far more than his pictures, even as the film offers 'perspective', above all else, to the viewer). Every relationship in the film is built upon irony, the irony of false assumptions, of misunderstandings, of deceptions deliberate and inadvertent, the irony of meek, humble, simple Chris becoming a brutal murderer and of Kitty never grasping his potential for this (it never occurred to her earlier that he was actually contemplating the murder of Adele).

What end, then, is served by all this quasi-Brechtian paraphernalia of distancing?—of what does the film ultimately wish us to become aware? I must take issue here with a critic I admire. I have found Chris Faulkner's *The Social Cinema of Jean Renoir* very useful and I share his enthusiasm for *La Chienne*, but regret that he found it necessary to establish that film's qualities at the expense of *Scarlet Street* (and, by implication, the Hollywood cinema in general):

'The entire thrust of *Scarlet Street*...is individual and moral, not social, so that Lang's film is the usual bourgeois melodrama in which potential contradiction is resolved rather than exposed.'

Very far from being, whether stylistically or thematically, 'the usual bourgeois melodrama', *Scarlet Street* is above all about American society. Its essential theme might be stated baldly thus: 'the corruption of all human relations by the money values of capitalism'. The film develops this singlemindedly. The only character who is not primarily motivated by money is Chris: in this, and in the fact that he is ultimately a murderer, he might be seen as the film's rough equivalent for Beckett (who, in his way, was another innocent, which is what makes him so terrifying and appalling). But Chris also is contaminated by money, his infatuation with Kitty leading him to steal from the bank where he works as cashier and, potentially, from his wife (the savings bonds he takes but then replaces). The money issue pervades the entire film from first to last—from the '14 carat, 17 jewel timepiece' presented to the '14 carat, 17 jewel cashier' for his loyal service in the first scene, right through to the last line ('For 10,000 dollars, I shouldn't think you'd mind'—a line that 'sums up' the film rather as, some years later, 'Keep the coffee hot' was to sum up *The Big Heat*). Johnny exploits Kitty for money, and Kitty (in her turn) Chris; Adele constantly reminds Chris of his financial impotence in comparison to her 'late' husband; the art world (like Hollywood itself) is more concerned with what will sell than with artistic value. If Chris is the film's nearest approach to a 'positive' character, the basis for this is his innocent enjoyment of painting for the sake of painting, never expecting remuneration. *Scarlet Street* is one of the supreme manifestations of Lang's ability to rethink his fascination with 'fate' in terms of the relentless working through of cultural mechanisms, the ideologically constructed drives that become 'impulse' under capitalism, the ultimate Langian 'trap'.

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The beginning of mutual incomprehension: Joan Bennett and Edward G. Robinson in *Scarlet Street*.

Scarlet Street is clearly an atypical Hollywood film; *While the City Sleeps* is far too fine to be called 'typical', but it fits the mould (one of very considerable plasticity) of 'Hollywood realism', with none of the disconcerting Europeaness, generic ambiguities and desolate ending of the earlier film. Neither, as a contemporary urban thriller, does it offer the Brechtian possibilities of the stylized period western (see my essay on *Rancho Notorious* in *CineAction* 13/14). Accordingly, in the necessarily cursory account that follows, I shall seldom invoke Brecht explicitly, and there is no reason to suppose that Lang was consciously aware of his influence. What I suggest is that, by the time he made the film, Lang had absorbed the essential Brechtian attitudes, thematics, morality and underlying principles so completely that they had become completely his own, and that he was able to work securely within the Hollywood codes (of which he had long since made himself the master, not the servant) without being false to himself or to the assumptions that had become second nature. The ultimate, sacrosanct basis of Hollywood practice is that it must be possible to read a film 'just for the story'; the only exception permitted is the 'social problem' film with its safely liberal message (the specific wrong can be righted without changing the system, it was all the fault of corrupt

individuals), a genre in which Lang showed little interest. If a Lang film has a 'moral' (as opposed to a Brechtian moral sense), it is not what is most important about it.

If the fundamental concern of *Scarlet Street* is the corruption of human relations by money, that of *While the City Sleeps* their corruption by power. The familiar capitalist equation, Money = Power, is reasonably but not entirely accurate: certainly under capitalism money and power are extremely intimate bedfellows but the terms are not quite synonymous. Though obviously in business more power brings more money, it is power itself that obsesses the manipulators that populate Kyne Inc., ultimately entangling everyone in an elaborate network of corruption. With his characteristic economy Lang establishes the theme of predators that dominates the film: a dissolve from the scrawled 'Ask Mother' (the serial killer's message to the world) briefly superimposes it upon the lighted sign of 'Kyne Inc.', connecting one type of predator to another; we are then introduced in turn to Ed Mobley/Dana Andrews (who is trying to seduce Nancy/Sally Forrest), Mark Loving/George Sanders (who would like to try), Mildred Donner/Ida Lupino (always on the lookout for any opening that might bring her any benefit, erotic or financial, with the emphasis on the latter), and other nameless

males in the offices (lasciviously eyeing Mildred): all watching and calculating in the desire for power, be it sexual or 'business'. The brilliant set design—the individual offices all 'open plan', with glass partitions instead of walls—offers the ideal environment for all these watcher-predators, visually facilitating the film's basic principle of thematic structure: comparison, the invitation to the audience to place character beside character, study behaviour patterns, assess the degrees of similarity and difference but above all of integrity, the central value in Lang's cinema.

Lang developed into one of Hollywood's most rigorous, intelligent and subversive moralists, encouraging us to look beyond action for motivation, never to be fooled by apparent good intentions (or by apparent hero-figures played by familiar stars), never to trust explicit statements even when the speaker appears to mean what he's saying (Mobley: 'I have no appetite for power'). Consistently for Lang, capitalism itself is profoundly immoral, but there are still distinctions to be made among those trapped in its web. We have the sense that *all* Lang's characters are on trial, and we are the jury. If it is important to grasp that all are contaminated, it is equally important to notice different shades of contamination (see, for instance, the jackets in the early scene of Walter Kyne's/Vincent Price's first meeting with his employees—Kyne and Kritzer/James Craig in black, positioned on opposite sides of the screen as mirror images, Loving in dark grey, Jon Day Griffith/Thomas Mitchell in light grey). Lang admires honesty, especially honesty with one's self: if Mildred

Donner (whose behaviour is as reprehensible as anyone's) is allowed to retain a degree of the audience's affection, a kind of grudging admiration, it is not only because she is a woman holding her own in a man's world by any means possible but because she is fully aware of what she is doing and why she is doing it, and perfectly frank about her own motivation.

The opening scene in the offices also establishes (as the necessary corollary, and by passing us swiftly from one 'looker' to another) the film's stylistic principle, the denial to the audience of the solidity and reassurance of identification. Although it's possible to watch *While the City Sleeps* 'just for the story', Lang goes to unusual lengths to make the spectator work. Our obvious identification-figure is Mobley: he is (by a short distance) the leading male character, *primus inter pares*, he is played by a well-known star, he (almost) catches the killer in a heroic chase, and he 'gets the girl'. Consequently, he must be accorded the most extreme distancing treatment available: with only the most perfunctory of qualms he sets up the woman he is supposed to love as bait for the killer, with minimal security, putting her life at risk. But the film goes further: it parallels him with the killer, quite explicitly. Both employ the same method (surreptitiously neutralizing the door latch) of getting back into women's apartments after they have been dismissed; and in the scene where the killer watches Mobley's challenge to him on television, Lang repeatedly cross-cuts between closeups of the two faces, establishing them as mirror images with the TV screen as the mirror. Unfair, perhaps: Mobley may be a 'heel'

Amos Kyne (Robert Warwick) on his office death-bed, surrounded by his team of contenders: Griffith (Thomas Mitchell), Mobley (Dana Andrews), Kritzer (James Craig).



but he is not a killer. Yet the cross-cutting raises an important moral conundrum: the killer, like Beckert before him, is essentially 'innocent', in that he can't help what he does; Mobley is, throughout the film, notably self-controlled (except perhaps when drunk, with Mildred exerting all her knowing charms). Which, then, is morally the more reprehensible?

Mobley is also (perhaps? probably?) a liar. Lang offers the spectator conflicting testimony on the subject, and refuses to resolve the contradiction. Did Mobley have sex with Mildred? He (and presumably the Hays Code) must insist that he didn't, that when he got out of that taxi he dismissed her and went home. But the story Mildred delightedly spreads around the offices is somewhat at odds with this account: no one (except perhaps a nodding censor) can miss the innuendo of her (attributed) remark that 'Now she *knows* you won the Pulitzer prize for... writing'. I'll take Mildred's word for it any day: Mobley doesn't even confront her on it, and his denial is strictly in the interests of rescuing his relationship with Nancy. But the decision is clearly the individual spectator's.

The film's opening sequences introduce another concern which connects Lang to Brecht: the inevitable deterioration of American (read capitalist) civilization. Amos Kyne has only one brief scene before dying of his heart attack, but it establishes with Lang's characteristic succinctness the thoroughly unAmerican (or unCapraesque) notion that, in a culture whose dominant values are money and power, any lingering idealism is not only under constant threat but will necessarily be overwhelmed. Lang's portrayal of the dying tycoon is not unsympathetic, but it is clear that Kyne Snr. is hopelessly confused about his own values. His professed ideal, passionately expressed, the supposed motive force of his enterprise, is to bring 'Truth' to the people, but this 'truth' is to be embedded in lurid and sensationalistic journalism: it is he who invents the headline tag 'The Lipstick Killer' (he wants 'every woman' in the U.S. 'scared silly every time she puts any on'). And the idealism takes second place to competition ('I don't like to have my wire service beat by every other one in the country'). The deterioration is then dramatized in the transition from father to son: the huge lighted 'Kyne Inc.' sign and power emblem switches off and dissolves to Amos' portrait; the despicable Walter is introduced standing beneath the portrait, looking up at it as he meditates his revenge on the father who spoiled him but excluded him from the exercise of power. It is Walter who then exacerbates the power-drives within a business corporation already populated by predators with his competition for the new position of 'Executive Director', knowingly provoking a situation of dog-eat-dog oneupmanship ('...when they realize that I hold their entire lives in my hands...'). His 'I'm going to get myself a gimmick' is linked in the image to his father's portrait; we recognize that Amos (while he would never have thought in those terms) also 'got himself a gimmick' ('The Lipstick Killer'). Walter is the American future, the embodiment of his father's worst aspect at the total expense of the good. Though the films are separated by thirty years, *Wall Street* is just around the corner.

The character who emerges from the intrigues and backstabbing with the most credit is clearly (as the casting might suggest) Jon Day Griffith: he is not above or beyond corruption, but at least, when he temporarily succumbs to the all-

pervading atmosphere, he is ashamed of himself. Lang (always sceptical, never cynical) allows him a degree of respect, and his is the one reward at the film's conclusion in which the spectator may feel any reasonable satisfaction, while making it clear that one relatively decent man can scarcely be expected to change the course of 'business'. At the opposite extreme is Harry Kritzer, connected to Kyne not only by their shared initial (and the 'i' of Kritzer is pronounced long) but by their shared woman: Dorothy/Rhonda Fleming is Kyne's wife and Kritzer's lover. If we feel contempt for Kyne, this does not in any way mitigate the cruelty with which he is treated by his wife and 'best friend'. The lovers' liaison is founded, not in any passion beyond a certain perverse sensuality, but in mutual exploitation, Kritzer using Dorothy as his means to gaining the coveted position without effort, Dorothy using him as a means to greater power for herself. Especially suggestive is the film's juxtaposition of their first 'love' scene with the Mobley/Nancy exchange in her apartment (initiated by his neutralizing of the door latch). Again the point is not only difference but similarity: both relationships are characterized by the participants' manoeuvring for positions of dominance, the multiple cynicisms of Kritzer/Dorothy finding an echo in the subtler cynicism of Mobley countered by the puritan primness of Nancy ('You don't want a bride. Just an illiterate common-law woman').

The ending (Mobley and Nancy's honeymoon) is undeniably problematic, though in an interesting and complex way. On a certain level it represents the inevitable reassuring 'happy end' generally demanded by Hollywood production companies—reassuring, that is, in terms of 'the system', which the final twist suggests is capable of doling out more or less the rewards and punishments the characters deserve. (I presume the ending of *Scarlet Street* was possible partly because of the film's general oddity and Europeaness, partly because it is superficially more 'moral' than Renoir's ending—though to me far more satisfying in the savagery and intransigence of its multiple ironies). Lang does all he can to disturb its surface with conflicting undercurrents. The ending's most conventionally 'happy' aspect, the more or less automatic production of the 'good heterosexual couple' accompanied by the elimination or redemption of the 'bad' elements, is not exactly calculated to send the spectator into ecstasies of wish-fulfilment, neither partner being particularly sympathetic (finding Mobley's weak and casual infidelity contemptible does not preclude us from finding Nancy priggish and commonplace). And just how surprised is Mobley at his reward (managing editor of the *Sentinel*, Kyne Inc.'s newspaper)? Despite his early denial that he has any 'appetite for power', hasn't he in fact done more than anyone else (in his quiet and surreptitious way) to attract attention while seeming indifferent to it? Walter Kyne's meting out of rewards and punishments is personally motivated, and any newfound strength of character it may indicate is immediately undercut by the news that he has replaced his incompetently conniving Dorothy/Rhonda Fleming with, of all people, Mildred Donner, the past mistress of connivance, who will have him utterly at her mercy. My impression is that, confronted with the demand for a resolution of the film's manifold tensions and subversions, Lang chose to give it with one hand whilst undermining it with the other. The spectator who finds it satisfying must be very easily satisfied indeed.



Barbara Stanwyck and Robert Ryan

RUNNING OUT OF PLACES

Fritz Lang's *Clash by Night*

by Douglas Pye

Clash by Night belongs generically to the great cycle of 'fifties Hollywood domestic melodramas which have been so central to film criticism since the 1970s. In accounts both of Lang and of melodrama, however, the film has had a marginal place, apparently regarded neither as significant Lang nor as important enough to deserve analysis within the canon of melodrama. Most Lang critics largely ignore the film or treat it with indifference; one—Reynold Humphries—roundly condemns it as 'a grotesque and unintentionally funny sub-melodrama with nothing to recommend it' (Humphries, 1989: xv).

I want to argue that it is both extraordinary melodrama and remarkable Lang, its particular qualities coming precisely from the conjunction of genre and *auteur*. The film is unusual among the major 1950s domestic melodramas in having a working class rather than a bourgeois setting but in other respects Alfred Hayes' and Lang's adaptation of Clifford Odets' 1941 stage play places the film firmly in the terrain of those melodramas which explore dilemmas of domesticity and which present these in terms of incompatible desires, particularly for women. Like Sirk's *All I Desire*, for instance, *Clash By Night* begins with a woman returning home and enacts a drama of intractable situations in which she has effectively two paths available to her—marriage or passion, home or rootlessness—but neither can lead to fulfillment.

Much of the power of melodrama in this period comes from the way its hyperbolic dramas of polarised desire expose contradictions in ideological constructions of gender and analyse tensions within the American family. Although Lang rarely made films that centred on the family, ideals of and illusions about the couple and domesticity are crucial to a significant number of his American movies, from *Fury* and *You Only Live Once* to *Rancho Notorious* and *The Big Heat*. Intractable situations have, of course, been taken to be a veritable hallmark of his work and one of the most obsessive tensions in his films is that between the determining forces operating on his characters and the possibility of individual respon-

sibility and moral choice. *Clash By Night* develops an extraordinary analysis of the characters' social situation (which also implies a strong critique of values central to American ideology) by means of a highly individual inflection of familiar melodramatic concerns and a fascinating variation in point of view strategies. The intensity of fifties melodrama comes from a constant play between powerful emotional involvement with the protagonists and varied forms of distance—cognitive, analytical, moral and so on. Characteristically, Lang shifts the balance towards the analytical, so that although the film is full of highly wrought emotional situations we are rarely if ever invited to take up a relationship to the characters that could be thought of as 'identification'.

The Lang films scripted by Alfred Hayes—*Clash By Night* and *Human Desire*—both have openings that strikingly encapsulate the constraints within the central characters move. Each is quintessential Lang, offering simultaneously an introduction to a specific social world and an informing image—unmistakably presented as such—which signals to the spectator some of the conditions which will govern the fictional world and our relationship to it. Each also carries strong connotations of determinism, *Human Desire* using the image of the train and railway tracks to establish the tension in the Glenn Ford character's position between controlling and being controlled and *Clash By Night* developing in an extended montage of the returning fishing fleet and the cannery a more complex image of the relationship between instinctual life, human society and industrial process.

But in a way *Clash By Night* has a double opening, with the credit sequence made up of a montage of scudding clouds and crashing waves acting, in combination with the turbulent music, almost stereotypically to signify unrestrained emotion and particularly sexual passion. Even more than the rails in *Human Desire*, the sequence seems an all but transparent metaphor, its referential function all but overwhelmed by its metaphorical force. Their 'obviousness' may indeed be a significant part of the point: the film begins, in effect, by *presenting* its mode (melodrama) and therefore foregrounding aspects of its subject (passion) and of its method (heightened metaphor). The waves are used again later, also as almost non-diegetic signifiers of emotion. In the heightened mode of melodrama there is invariably a balancing act between *presenting* and *representing* a world, which is why the genre has been so responsive to analyses which draw on Brechtian concepts of distanciation. But Lang seems to tilt the balance towards *presentation* more than most and to invite

Jerry (Paul Douglas) Mae and Earl form a triangle.

from the outset a more cerebral than emotional engagement. One consequence of the 'obviousness' of the crashing waves should be to alert us to the significance of the equally metaphorical but apparently almost documentary montage that follows. A second is to pose the implicit question of the relationship between the turbulent forces of emotion and the process which follows.

We see seals and seabirds clustered on and around floating platforms (which turn out to be the funnels into which fish are poured); fishing boats returning to port; the hooter sounding at a large industrial complex; women on their way into work. Cut into the montage are the first shots of characters, although at this stage we don't know who they are: Joe (Keith Andes) bringing coffee to Jerry (Paul Douglas) at the helm of one of the boats; Peggy (Marilyn Monroe) being woken by an alarm clock and climbing sleepily into her clothes. As the boats reach the platforms they stop and fish are scooped into the funnels, surrounded by seals and birds. On shore the fish are pumped onto conveyor belts and transported into the cannery which is criss-crossed by belts and lines carrying cans and fish. We see Marilyn Monroe join a line of women grading the arriving catch. A train whistle sounds over the final seconds of the cannery, followed by a cut to a train which is incorporated into the sequence with carefully matched rhythm and camera position. It stops, then pulls away, revealing Mae (Barbara Stanwyck).

At the heart of the sequence and central to its metaphorical force are a series of interconnections and interdependencies. Fishing, which we may tend to think of as a traditional *craft*, becomes part of an industry characterised by the impersonal mechanical process through which fish are carried from sea to can with minimal intervention from man. Workers in the cannery (women) are reduced to almost anonymous functionaries (it is difficult not to think of *Metropolis*) and fishermen to servants of the machine. Bound into the same cycle of dependency are the birds and seals which have become conditioned to expect rich pickings when the fleet returns and have in effect become parasitic on the cannery.

The montage presents both a documentary 'reality' and a schematic metaphor for the conditions of social life in this setting. Not only economic but instinctual life is dependent on the cannery, as though the machine controls social role, economic status and the expression of desires and needs, a complex image which has the potential to convey both external forces acting on the characters and their internalisation of ideological norms. The introduction of Mae, her arriving train seeming almost an extension of the cannery, binds her return into the same impersonal mechanism, as if the process encompassed everyone and everything—her return as inevitable as the fish ending in a can. The sequence creates one of the most severe images of social and ideological determinism in all Lang's films and establishes a context for a drama which seems to imply an extraordinarily pessimistic view of human freedom.

At the same time the sequence functions in a way that parallels Brecht's concept of 'Gestus'. Although in Brecht's theatre 'Gestus' centred on how actors conveyed 'the whole range of the outward signs of social relationships' (Martin Esslin, *Brecht, A Choice of Evils*, London: Heinemann, 1965, 119) and here the actors are called on to do very little, Lang uses the resources of film to achieve a similar effect: convey-



ing the play of social forces within which the drama will take place and simultaneously defining the analytical distance which should enable the spectator to understand its significance. From the outset there is therefore a fundamental tension between the massive determinism that dominates the characters' world and point of view strategies which offer the spectator a much more privileged view.

The next two sequences introduce a network of major characters, linked by blood, desire and work: Mae is Joe's sister, Peggy his fiancée; Joe works on Jerry's boat; Jerry's father is 'too old for work'. Jerry and Mae meet (Jerry recognises her) when he comes into Angelo's bar to drag Poppa (Milvio Minciotti) out. As they leave, Jerry's Uncle Vince (J. Carroll Naish) makes his first appearance, scuttling into the bar, pocketing handfuls of peanuts from the bar and scuttling out. Patterns of interrelationship also introduce ideas of obligation and responsibility: Uncle is supposed to take care of Poppa but clearly doesn't; Jerry—in what is clearly a familiar routine—drags Poppa out of the bar, treating him almost as though he was an errant child rather than his father. The dialogue of the following scene introduces ideas of the responsibility work involves and the obligations of marriage. Even at this early stage this network of relationships and responsibilities is underlined by Lang's *mise en scène*, which is characterised almost throughout the film by longer takes and more moving camera than are common in his work.

But it is worth noting that the stylistic tendency and the characters' relationships do not evoke, as they clearly could, a feeling of community in the small fishing port. Indeed, the idea of community seems as alien to Lang as it is central to Renoir and even those scenes—the wedding reception and the beach pavilion—which have the potential to evoke community, hardly do so, focusing rather on the discontented figures of Uncle Vince and Earl (Robert Ryan) rather than emphasising the supportive power of communal life. The film makes interdependency a crucial fact but not a source of comfort or solidarity. Lang's style constantly reinforces the idea of links between characters and places them firmly within—as part of—their environment but it also places us at a distance, encouraging observation rather than empathy.

Questions about gender roles also begin to be posed by these scenes. The film begins with a clear demarcation between men and women's work—men at sea, women in the cannery—but rapidly introduces complications. The editing may imply that Mae is no freer than the women in the cannery but her actions—drinking whisky in the early morning—and her hard-bitten manner carry a distinctly 'masculine' edge, particularly in comparison to the two 'feminised' figures of Poppa and Jerry—Poppa who clearly feels unmanned by being 'too old for work' and Jerry who despite his size takes on with his father a role we might think of as stereotypically motherly. The personae of Stanwyck and Douglas are crucial here in creating a potential couple that seems wildly ill-matched and in which the conventional polarities of gender seem to be reversed.

In the personal and social relationships the film begins to define, links between gender and work are accompanied by those between work, home and marriage. When Mae arrives at the family house, Lang cuts to Peggy leaving work and being met outside the cannery by Joe. The scene is played in a continuous travelling shot as they cross the road to the

house, when Mae's voice from out of frame interrupts them. The relationship between cannery and house is underscored by the camera movement and paralleled by the transition in the dialogue from work to marriage. Peggy talks sympathetically of women falling asleep at work and Joe responds by insisting 'A man pays you a day's wages, you should give him a day's work'. He takes an equally unbending line over marriage, suggesting (it's difficult at this stage to say how serious he is) in reply to another of Peggy's stories that a husband has the right to beat his wife, an idea at which Peggy bridles and a mock fight ensues. The juxtaposition of the economic relationships at work with relationships in marriage imply that they are similarly hierarchical—woman the worker and wife subordinate to man the employer and husband, while the spatial placing of house and cannery suggest the inseparability of private and public arenas.

Work and marriage continue as central motifs. Unlike the original play, the film makes no reference to unemployment but it dramatises work in ways that strongly suggest its alienating power. The impersonal and anonymous process of the cannery defines the possibilities of work for most of the central characters, so that even the traditional 'romantic' connotations that could be tapped in representing the fishermen are firmly rejected. Joe and Jerry unquestioningly accept the conditions of their working lives, but the way in which work comes to define and finally destroy the sense of self is dramatised through Poppa who spends the movie in a forlorn search for employment, unable to conceive of a worthwhile identity or find a social role without a job. Earl (Robert Ryan), whom Jerry describes as 'in the movie business' is associated as a projectionist with the mundane mechanics of movies, as much a functionary as the other working characters. For women the situation is perhaps even more constrained than for men. Work in the cannery is clearly exhausting (the women who fall asleep) and wholly unfulfilling. Peggy dislikes the idea of always working there but sees it as inevitable that even after marriage she will be forced back by economic circumstances.

For women the only apparent alternatives to the cannery are marriage and 'escape' but in the network of links which the film encourages us to perceive, they are not so much alternatives as routes within a completely enveloping social process, each defined in relation to the other and governed by the same ideological programme. Even Mae's return, the opening montage implies, is somehow an extension of the process which contains Jerry, Joe and Peggy. The film's view of marriage is correspondingly bleak. Romantic fantasies about marriage, which have a role in other Lang films, are largely absent here, only Peggy's delight at receiving an engagement ring suggesting the conventions of romance and even that is firmly placed by a context in which marriage offers anything but romantic fulfillment. Two marriages are referred to but not seen: Earl's, which ends in divorce during the film but which is characterised before this by the absence of his wife, who tours in burlesque; and Jerry's parents', which ended with his father bereft after his wife's death but which Jerry describes as a constant battleground during her lifetime. Earl's absent wife echoes the dilemmas dramatised in Mae and Peggy, both of whom have contradictory desires—for the security of marriage on the one hand and for 'freedom' on the other. At each stage Peggy's sympathy for

Mae and attempts to assert the primacy of feeling ('She's got a right to do what she likes if she loves him') are met with outright hostility by Joe and her final capitulation in tears is eloquent of the potential cost at which she will marry. Mae marries Jerry out of a need for security which she expresses explicitly as an escape from 'the blizzards and floods' but is able to sustain the marriage only by keeping temptation at arm's length. For the women, suppression of need seems to be a fundamental condition of marriage.

The fact that contradictory desires are dramatised most explicitly through the women, not the men, associates the film more with female than male melodrama. It is not uncommon in women's melodrama for the opposed paths available to the heroine to be expressed in terms of two men, one sexy but unsuitable and one suitable but stolid and sexless. In *Clash By Night* the conventional opposition is drawn on but inflected. Although suitability in class terms (a frequent ingredient of melodramas with middle class settings) is not an issue, Jerry and Earl still carry some of the familiar terms of opposition (dull vs exciting, sexless vs sexy etc). But the film invites us to see parallels as well as contrasts in the demands they make on Mae. Although what each wants from her is outwardly different, they are defined as equally needy.

In Earl this is signalled initially in his torment over his wife's possible infidelity and his claim that 'A man without a woman is nothing', as though he needs a woman to complete his sense of himself. Ultimately, his claims on Mae are perhaps even more absolute than Jerry's because he insists on the overarching rights which 'love' creates. Jerry's total subordination to convention leads him both to accept his work literally without question ('Like it? I don't know. It's what I do') and to construct the idea of the 'wonderful wife' he believes Mae can be as the model of domesticated motherhood. In the scene when Jerry finds out about her affair with Earl, Mae forcefully articulates her view of the role she has played in their marriage: 'Wash my face, Mae! Comb my hair, Mae! Be my cook, nurse, accountant and bottle washer!'. It is striking that although at times in this scene Lang frames Mae with Earl and Jerry by himself, at this point and others he places her at the apex of a triangle, with the two men in the foreground as the base, one at each side of the frame. In the dynamics of the scene he works variations on the idea of the couple and the excluded man but also shows Mae caught between the insistent demands of the two men.

In fact the three central men are in different ways equally conventional in their demands on women. Far from men having to be won over to the idea of marriage and settlement, here all the men are committed to marriage, while it is the women who are divided. Jerry has unquestioningly internalised social norms; Earl is bound not so much by the outward forms of social convention as by an essentially conventional construction of romantic love; Joe is perhaps the film's most normative character and his unbending conventionality defines one extreme in the film's world—throughout the film he embodies a particularly stern form of masculinity, which carries in Keith Andes' performance strong connotations of repression. Joe is more aware than Jerry of potential threats to moral order and harshly disapproves of the unconventional or deviant, while in his attitudes to work he is the spokesman for unquestioning duty, intolerant of weakness or laxity. In his much later dialogue with Peggy about marriage

he takes an equally hard line, making clear that he sees the claims and responsibilities of marriage as absolute. In that scene Peggy, who attempts through much of the film to straddle the utterly opposed camps of convention and of individual freedom, is terrified into submission and collapses sobbing into Joe's arms.

Following the logic of the opening sequence and of the binary structures of melodrama, the various assertions of individuality and freedom in the film are also presented as contradictory or illusory—indeed, they are seen predominantly to be determined by the social constraints within which the characters live. At the opposite pole to Joe's insistence on obligation and responsibility is Uncle Vince's complete self-centredness and total rejection of responsibility to others, fuelled by resentment at his dependence on his nephew but also contradicted by the inescapable social ties which his dependency illustrates. Uncle Vince is a wholly negative figure—callous, unfeeling and destructive—who is constructed in almost demonic terms, but his parasitical relationship to family also embodies a central dichotomy of the film, between the claims of individuality and of social connection. However, if Vince is a character who, to use a Leavisian phrase, is entirely 'anti-life', it is more difficult to define a corresponding positive because the values that carry moral and emotional weight in the film are fraught with contradiction.

In Mae and Earl the impulse to freedom is held in tension with a deep-rooted need for security, love and safety, expressed by Earl in his desperation over his wife and his drunken 'Guard your castle, Jeremiah', and in Mae by the repeated lines which articulate her fantasy of being protected from all harm, even before she pursues this dream by marrying Jerry. Significantly, Mae's dream of combining love and security before she returned home foundered on the power of law to enable her lover's wife and family to deny her the money he had willed her and therefore the possibility of economic independence. The context of the whole film gives this a more than contingent status—dreams of freedom and escape will inevitably founder because they are defined by relationship to their opposite—desires bound by reciprocal implication. The idea that, as Mae says, 'Home is where you come when you run out of places' is a bitter acknowledgement of defeat and also an implicit challenge to the traditional American ideology of re-forging identity through mobility and escape from the past.

The place of instinct and of moral choice in this context of massive social and ideological determinism is clearly problematical. In earlier Lang films instinct (like that of the murderer in *M*) is another determining force, compelling the individual to act. Part of the murderer's defence in *M* is that he is unable to control his actions, unlike the common criminals. Elsewhere, as in *Dr Mabuse the Gambler*, sexual desire and love are forces which cut across and undermine the rational control of the master criminal. In the American films, love and desire are increasingly absorbed into the wider ideological context, shaped as much by society as other aspects of the characters' lives. From the outset *Clash By Night* presents two apparently contradictory images of instinct: the elements which symbolise the unruly and uncontrollable forces of passion and the birds and seals whose appetites have become conditioned to the rhythms of the cannery. The two images might be said to embody the views of some of the characters

on the one hand and of the film on the other: if Mae, Earl and to some extent Peggy, see 'love' as a force of nature which carries its own imperatives, the film's view is rather different.

In fact Mae, Earl and Jerry share essentially the same view of unruly desire, even expressing it in parallel ways, Mae referring to 'People hav[ing] funny things swimming about in them' and telling Jerry 'You don't know me. What kind of animal am I? What zoo do I come from?' while Jerry later accuses Mae and Earl of being 'animals': 'In a zoo they keep them in a cage, they keep them apart. They stop them from hurting people . . . Animals!' For Jerry, as for Joe, such feelings should be caged, repressed; for Mae and Earl they are forces that cannot be contained.

The film on the other hand follows the implication of its opening sequence by implying that desires and needs are shaped and conditioned by material circumstances in ways the characters cannot recognise. After telling Jerry why marrying him would not work (in the scene on Jerry's boat shortly after their first date) Mae then takes the initiative and agrees to marriage immediately after she has repelled Earl's sexual advances outside the pavilion: the threat of Earl produces the opposing desire for safety from 'the blizzards and the floods'. Lang parallels this decision with her return home at the opening of the film by using similar shots of the approach to the house and framing Mae once again on the porch as she talks to Jerry below her at street level. Marrying Jerry is the equivalent of returning home 'when you run out of places'.

The film also charts the development of Mae and Earl's relationship so that we can perceive how desire is first shaped and then rationalised by circumstances. Mae herself sees how Earl's initial sexual approach is driven by the circumstances of his marriage. When he returns after the birth of Mae and Jerry's baby the context implies that their sexual relationship is the result not so much of desire for each other as of desperate need for *someone*, driven in each case by their immediate circumstances: Earl's divorce and desperate loneliness, and Mae's unsuccessful attempt, signalled by the return of the crashing waves as she stands by the window while Jerry and the baby sleep, to sublimate sexual and emotional need into motherhood and domesticity. Later, in the scene after their confrontation with Jerry, their dialogue and performances are strikingly rhetorical, as if the characters are reaching not just for rationalizations of what they have done but for the appropriate *roles* to play: 'Don't make me sorry for him. If I'm sorry for him, I can't feel sorry for us and we'll both be sorry love was invented... This is my last shot at happiness... Love me or love him. Somebody's throat has to be cut... Love is rotten when it happens like this, the wrong way, but if we want each other we have to walk through fire, because this is forever'. It is impossible to convey in writing the qualities of Robert Ryan's performance but the stilted and artificial quality of the dialogue suggests something of what is involved. The writing and performance decisions are designed to make these feel like *speeches*, in which the characters (and particularly Earl) play out their parts in a drama which they conceive in the most extreme terms. The rhetoric eloquently opens a gap between what the character feels and how he wants to see and present himself. Lang places the scene on the beach, so that there is a potential for a liberating contrast between earlier confining interiors and the resonant presence and sound of waves on the shore, but after the first

shot Lang strategically uses the artificiality of back projection to undercut the connotations of freedom and to encapsulate the characters' self-delusions (a nice example of the way in which studio artifice can be used to shape point of view).

Lang retains this emphasis on the shaping of desire by circumstances to the end. In her final scene with Earl after she returns to the house to collect the baby, only to find that Jerry has taken her away, Mae comes to see her dream of escape as a rejection of responsibility and commitment: 'All my life I've walked away from things... I never belonged to anybody. . . I thought I wasn't lying but I was. I said to the world, "This is what I am—take me or leave me", so that it was always on my terms they had to accept me. It was a trick. Can't you see, Earl, it was a trick to avoid the responsibility of belonging to someone'. Earl counters by claiming that within a month or two 'the old music in the juke box will start all over again' and that then Mae will want him or someone like him. Mae denies this and claims that she is willing to risk losing both Earl and Jerry. It is possible to take Mae's declarations at face value as her overdue recognition of mutual obligation, even as Mae finally confronting the inevitable limitations of adulthood. Lotte Eisner, for instance, takes the end of the film to imply that 'Mae has learned how empty and meaningless adventures can be' and that 'Everyone is responsible for their own destiny' (Eisner, 1986: 320). The emphasis on responsibility, the breakdown of illusion and the need for trust certainly carry the force of familiar, 'adult' truths and Mae's change of heart seems to imply the reality of moral choice and the possibility of change. But in the context of the whole film we should be cautious in reading this too straightforwardly. We do not need to understand Mae as wholly self-deluded but Lang allows us to understand, as Mae does not, the significance of the immediate context in which her 'conversion' takes place. She has been able to overcome her guilt at taking the baby from Jerry up to the point at which he takes Gloria from her. Earl's self-absorption and desire to deny Mae's need for her child become obvious to her at the point at which she risks losing Gloria. Her inability to leave the baby becomes her overriding need, providing material conditions which turn her previous desires on their head.

Seen in this way, as part of a network of perspectives on characters' actions, Mae's embracing of responsibility is not so much conversion to the truth as a rationalisation rooted in the desire for her child, which displaces her desire for Earl and 'freedom'. It is significant and chilling that as part of her response to Earl she dismisses his appeal to love by reducing love to its material determinants: 'Love because we're lonely, love because we're frightened, love because we're bored . . .', an important level of self-awareness but one that does not extend to understanding the determinants of her reversal.

The final scene, in which Jerry finally accepts Mae back, gives significant weight to his dignified acknowledgement that 'you gotta trust somebody, there ain't no other way' but there are clear qualifications to what is offered at one level as the promise of the tentatively re-made marriage. Mae does not challenge Jerry's accusation that she never loved him and that all she wanted was to be taken care of. The sequence is set on Jerry's boat and the restricted, enclosed space in which it takes place gives the scene a distinctly claustrophobic feeling. We do not see the baby again and a view of the complete family is therefore withheld. The last image of Mae, about to

enter the doorway leading to the next room in response to Jerry's 'Go take your child home' carries connotations of immolation that Barbara Stanwyck's transfigured expression only serves to intensify. The film's final image is of a fishing boat sailing out to sea, as though the process outlined in the opening sequence was beginning all over again.

It is in these wider contexts of perspectives offered to the spectator that the reality of moral choice is problematised. Characters seem repeatedly to make choices about their lives—Mae, for instance, to return home, to marry Jerry, to begin an affair with Earl, then to end it. Mae's apparent self-awareness in the penultimate scene seems to contrast significantly with the fatalism ('Some things you do, some things you don't') of her early dialogue with Joe and Peggy and to register a marked moral growth. But overall the film seems to imply a bleaker view, that characters struggle with competing needs which are channelled into conventional forms of expression (marriage, 'escape'). 'Choice' is little more than the dominant need of the moment and the consequent (and inevitably temporary) attempt to suppress others. Even for Lang it is an extremely pessimistic view of human action. 'T—R—A—P' is not simply, as Earl puts it, the way that 'responsibility' is spelt, but the condition of human life in the contemporary America the film represents.

But to conclude on that note would be to confuse the world Lang creates and which his characters inhabit, with the film as a whole. *Clash By Night* is not one of the films in which Lang challenges his spectators by limiting their access to narrative information. Rather it uses the characteristic method of film melodrama to provide access to events and characters that does not seem subject to significant restriction and therefore to give us a view much wider than that of

the characters. Lang chooses to reinforce the cognitive distance which these narrative methods create through a visual style which often holds us spatially at a distance, observing and following the movements of characters. At the same time, as I have suggested, the major characters seem constructed (through performance and dialogue) as well as presented, in ways which discourage—even prevent—'identification'. Lang begins by *presenting* the film's mode and its world to us, providing an informing image which embodies a whole network of social relationships, very much as Brecht prescribed for his epic theatre. Clearly the film does not contain the overtly distancing devices of *Rancho Notorious*; here distantiation is much more closely integrated into generic convention. But the two films (made in the same year) are closely related both in terms of their ideological analysis and their demands (rather differently articulated) on the spectator: each is concerned with how we see and what as a result we understand.

This is to say that although *Clash By Night* seems deeply pessimistic, its point of view strategies imply a somewhat different position. In the extraordinary lucidity of its construction and the rigour of the analysis it pursues, the film embodies Lang's characteristic (though always qualified) faith in rational thought. It offers us a kind of analysis and understanding—and therefore a kind of freedom—that is denied to its characters.

This article was written for an anthology on Lang, edited by Douglas Pye, to be published later this year by Cameron and Hollis.

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Earl and Mae argue about their future together.



UNDER CAPRICORN

Hitchcock in Transition

by Florence Jacobowitz

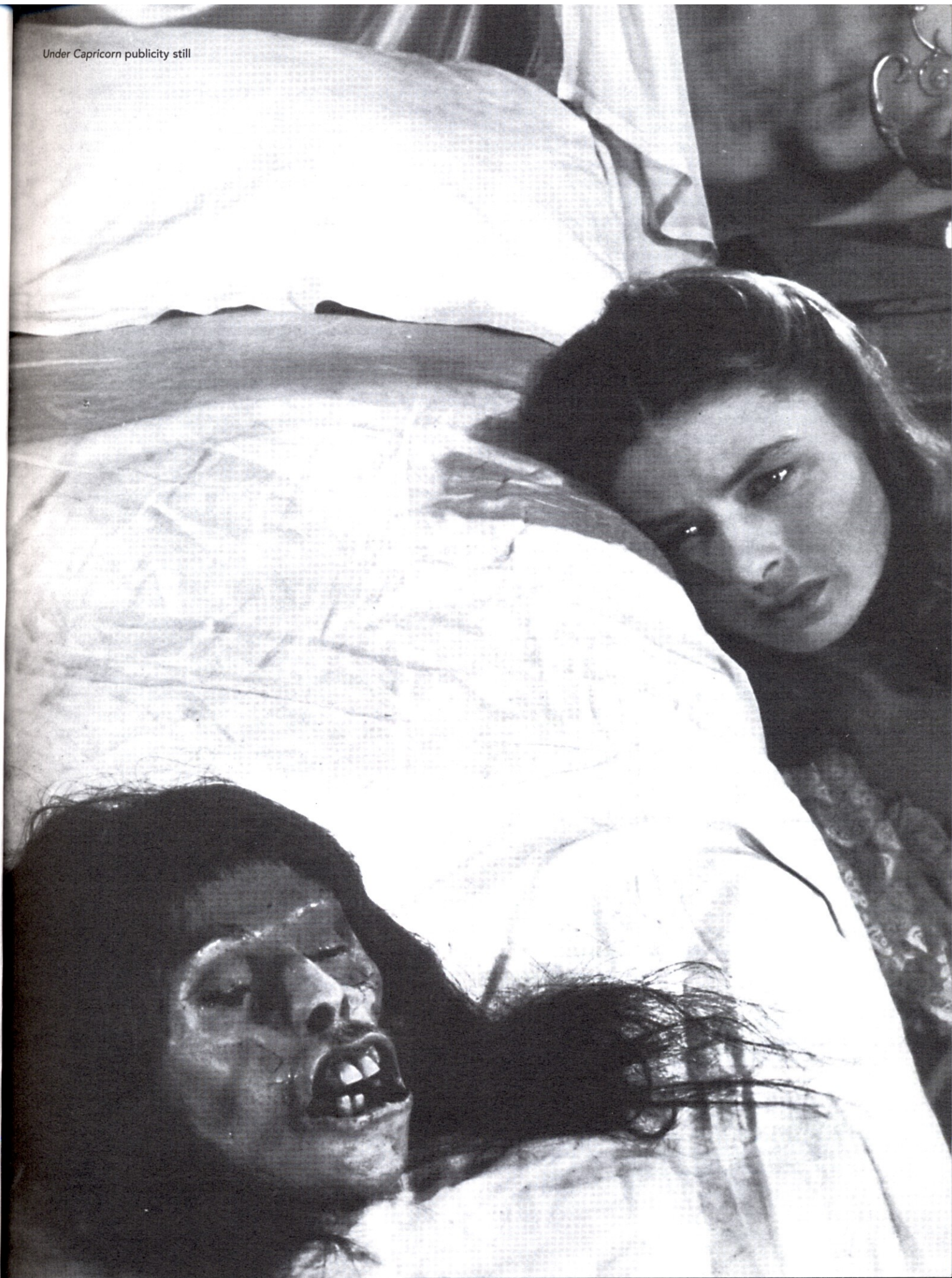
It is fitting that *Under Capricorn* was Ingrid Bergman's last 'studio' film (her third and final project with Alfred Hitchcock) prior to her series of collaborative works with Roberto Rossellini in Italy. *Under Capricorn* is a film which exemplifies a particular system of filmmaking production—identifiable as a Bergman star vehicle, a variant of the gothic melodrama, an Alfred Hitchcock film—but is also an adieu to it. Planned as a 'prestige' production, it was to be the debut film for Hitchcock and producer Sidney Bernstein's nascent Transatlantic Pictures, to be shot in Britain after almost a decade of Hitchcock's working in Hollywood. Because Bergman was engaged in other projects, the film was delayed until she was available and consequently was the company's second production following *Rope*. It was unpopular with the public and critical community alike. Aside from the attention and support the film received from *Cahiers du Cinéma* and its critics (Jean Domarchi's review appeared in *Cahiers du Cinéma* No. 39, Jacques Rivette's in *La Gazette du Cinéma* No. 4, Eric Rohmer and Claude Chabrol include a brief discussion in *Hitchcock*, New York: Frederick Ungar, 1979) and a valuable reading of *Under Capricorn* in the context of Bergman's star image by Robin Wood in *Hitchcock's Films Revisited* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989) the film remains virtually ignored.

Under Capricorn deliberately evokes the memory of earlier achievements. It summons forth the gothic melodrama and Bergman's star persona as a form of shorthand, to address the tensions surrounding gender relations and specifically, the institution of marriage, but then remarkably moves beyond the familiar parameters it signals through its rejection of one of the mainstays which sustains the genre: self-abnegation and sacrifice. The necessity of the woman's sacrifice—she renounces her identity, her right to speak, desire and ultimately, to remain sane, in order to assuage and validate her husband's fragile ego—fuels the intense emotional terrain dramatized in these narratives. If their popularity is attributable to the space they allow for fantasies of resistance (or at least, the articulation of dissatisfaction) they still remain embedded in the values of a society that cannot conceive of marriage as a union rooted in a bond of love and mutual respect that overcomes the inequities of gender and class. It is the entrenchment of these ideological values that vitalizes the woman's film. The genre gives a shape and form to an unspoken truth, namely, that marital relations are built upon the woman's denial of her strength, her sexuality, her claim to an identity outside of the home. By offering a resolution which envisions the promise of a future for the couple based on a rejection of secrecy and denial, *Under Capricorn* foresees the possibility of movement beyond the clausturation of the gothic. Ultimately, it reclaims the viability of romantic love for the marriage.

Bergman's star persona is a perfect cipher for dramatizing these concerns, and it is not accidental that the flowering of her career and the woman's film, and the Freudian/gothic melodrama in particular, coincided. Bergman's sensuality, intelligence and assertiveness, her secure identity, is threatening to the status quo. A number of critics have remarked upon the trajectory of punishment and abuse that is a typical response to the resistance she naturalizes and presents. Bergman's star persona is inherently transgressive and Hitchcock exploited its oppositional potential twice before *Under Capricorn* in *Spellbound* (1945) and *Notorious* (1946)¹. At the same time, the persona, as a figure of positive identification, is radicalized by the star's ability to synthesize opposition with integrity. This

1. See Andrew Britton's definitive reading of *Spellbound*, "Spellbound: Text and Subtext". *CineAction* 3/4 (1985) as well as his comments on *Notorious* in *Cary Grant: Comedy and Male Desire*, Tyneside Cinema 1983.

Under Capricorn publicity still



extraordinary aspect of the Bergman persona is carefully elaborated and reinforced in a series of key performances in the 40's culminating, arguably, in Cukor's quintessential gothic masterpiece *Gaslight*. Bergman's genuineness, her inability to collude or pretend is essential to the film's meaning. Often described as "goodness" and "niceness", Bergman maintains her dignity throughout the ordeals she is made to suffer. Ed Gallafent is right to point to Paula's/Ingrid Bergman comment to her oppressive husband, Anton/Charles Boyer in *Gaslight* as exemplifying this trait. ("Black Satin: Fantasy, Murder and the Couple in *Gaslight* and *Rebecca*". *Screen*, Vol. 29, No. 3, Summer 1998, 54-103 at p. 98). The weight of her simple statement "I never lie to you" resonates, because unlike the duplicitous, egocentric man in whom she has given her trust, she has been honest and genuine consistently. It is not, therefore, surprising that trial by fire, renunciation or illness are the most common solutions to the problem she poses: her refusal to be guilty.

Hitchcock created *Under Capricorn* for Ingrid Bergman and claimed in an interview with Francois Truffaut that he thought "this was a story for a woman". (*Hitchcock*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967, p. 138). The face, by the end of the decade which witnessed the inauguration of the gothic with Hitchcock's *Rebecca*, articulates a great deal just by its appearance. Claude Chabrol's comment that *Under Capricorn* (like *Notorious*) is the story of a face (Rohmer, Chabrol, p. 102) echoes the observation made of the Rossellini films, which were similarly described as documentaries of a face.² However distinct in terms of aesthetics, *Under Capricorn* is a logical precursor to the Rossellini collaborations which continued to use the richness of Bergman's well-established persona to contemplate gender relations, the problem of the woman's place, and to begin imagining the possibility of recovery and regeneration 'Year Zero' after the war.

Under Capricorn uses the gothic melodrama to investigate a state of paralysis. By the end of the decade, Hitchcock could use the conventions in a condensed, allegorical manner, because by then the audience was attuned to the genre's hyperbolic, coded language. In the gothic or Freudian melodrama, one expects a dreamscape, where meaning is concentrated and condensed through a meticulous use of gesture, detail, dramatic space and location, potent symbolization and a tone of latent hysteria. A collar of rubies or a mirror are signifying loci of meaning, 'loaded' objects, symbolizing repressed fears and power struggles: the necklace is frequently used to symbolize the husband's attempts to contain his wife, to claim her as his property and mirrors often reflect the woman's identity as an object of beauty and desire, which is simultaneously a reflection of her value in society. By 1949 the theme of 'marriage-is-a-nightmare' was demonstrated with such frequency that the terms were familiar. The heroine is persecuted, degraded and nearly murdered by her unsympathetic husband who is shielded by his social right to be dominating, self-serving and violent, and by protocol which condones the wife's sequestration within the domestic home. The home is a symbolic place where anxiety accumulates and explodes, the site of terror often pinpointed in the bedroom. The wife's humiliation is often staged before a sinister housekeeper whom the husband empowers (she is given the keys) in order to confirm his wife's incapacitation, and to increase her suffering, insecurity and sense of self-loss. The terrible secret that is repressed in the stifling house points to a crisis of male subjectivity—the hus-

band's fears of inadequacy, frailty and impotence (his own 'femininity') vivified by his wife who evokes the memory of this threat, resulting in the husband's need to punish and victimize his wife. Interestingly, Tania Modleski identifies this as a central motivating theme in Hitchcock's oeuvre (*The Women Who Knew Too Much: Hitchcock and Feminist Theory*, New York: Methuen, 1998). Hitchcock and his male protagonists are both attracted to and threatened by strong women; they evoke the male's bisexuality and are punished for it relentlessly. The irony is that the paradox is unresolvable. The woman's accelerating punishment cannot assuage or repair his insecurity as it is a result of it, hence the bitter resolutions or circular structures of so many of these films—it is impossible to move forward. Burying *Rebecca* or killing Alice Alquist never assures their containment. They are either resurrected or reappear in potential replacements to continue to haunt and seduce both genders. Despite Maxim's/Lawrence Olivier warning to Mrs. de Winter/Joan Fontaine in *Rebecca* "never to wear black satin, or pearls, or to be thirty-six years old" the latter is drawn to *Rebecca* magnetically. Despite herself "sometimes in my dreams, I do go back..." haunted by the pull of an unresolved dilemma.

Often these narratives attempt to extricate themselves from the ideological turmoil and stalemate into which they inevitably lead by offering an alternative male saviour, often modeled on the 19th century lover who is more accessible to the heroine as he is sensitive, talkative, innocent, even feminized in contrast to the stiffer, more repressed and volatile husband. In Max Ophüls' *Caught* (also made in 1949), a working-class doctor steps in to save the protagonist from her folly of having married for social mobility and money. The woman's film, however, never pretends to underestimate its audience's intelligence; often the alternative male is equally uncomfortable with the heroine and balances the husband's attempts to harm her with his own attempts to remake her in terms with which he can live, that validate his sense of self. Both males use the woman to compensate for their insecurity. Narratives like *Caught* make explicit reference to this, pointing out the similarity in motivation through subtle parallels. The husband's mink is replaced with a cheaper coat, but its visual purpose—to define and enclose the heroine—is the same. The potential good hero's recasting of the heroine still fails to recognize her needs. This is a central theme of *Notorious* and Hitchcock underlines the ideological ramifications of this narrative strategy by inverting the terms; in *Notorious*, Devlin/Cary Grant, the good American hero, is as or more oppressive than the feminized husband who colludes in attempting to murder his wife as a means of compensating for her betrayal. Devlin's ambivalence is less easily accounted for.

The narrative substance of *Under Capricorn* is, therefore, familiar. One is confronted with a marriage in shambles, a wife who is ill, degraded and on the verge of madness in a house that guards its secrets. The housekeeper is sinister and the husband is enigmatic: an emancipated criminal with an undisclosed past, a former lowly horse groom. Charles Adare/Michael Wilding, our initial guide, is a potential romantic hero—he is young, inexperienced, a newcomer to the community, feminized by his lack of means, his inability to ride a horse, yet he is armed with class privilege and a cousin who is the new governor in New South Wales. He is invited to the Flusky home and becomes enamoured of the wife who is in

desperate need of salvation. It is Adare's desire and project to resurrect her, for himself, as the young unmarried Lady Hattie Considine as he calls her, of noble Irish lineage, as his potential wife. Adare's wish is to recreate Lady Hattie as he remembers her. Adare, like the Inspector Brian Cameron/Joseph Cotten in *Gaslight*, is fascinated with an idealized memory derived from childhood; he remembers his older sister's friend, just as Cameron recalls his youthful obsession with the beautiful Alice Alquist through Paula. The narrative problematic—Who can make Henrietta well again?—is played out as a contest of wills, articulating issues of identity and ownership between the alternative husbands. One of the climactic sequences in *Under Capricorn*, Henrietta's moment of triumph at the ball, foregrounds this battle. Henrietta's emergence as Adare's creation, an image of aristocratic beauty, her debut as her former self reincarnated, is met with Flusky's public reclaiming of his wife, overriding his concerns for her well-being and recovery and causing Henrietta to suffer intense humiliation. The disruption and outburst are brutal declarations of ownership, reminders that the princess is, in fact, the wife of a classless former horse groom.

The key to Henrietta's release and the true restoration of her smile and full health lies in the complete revelation of buried, unresolved and undiscussed secrets and resentments harboured by the couple. In the Freudian melodrama the 'crime', the unutterable, is embodied in the ghost of feminine empowerment who taunts and mocks the institution of marriage through her disregard for the woman's place of subservience and her bold assertion. *Rebecca* is remembered as being in control, promiscuous and admired. Alice Alquist is adored for her talent, her wealth and independence, brazenly displayed in the royal jewels given to her as a token of devotion, sewn into her favourite costume of the Empress Theodora. *Under Capricorn* is expected to explain the current state of Henrietta's debilitation through the revelation of some transgression performed by a once strong, healthy, challenging woman. The casting of

Bergman suggests that the shadow self, the buried double is a long suppressed part of the protagonist. Were the film a typical gothic melodrama, one would expect the anxiety surrounding the marriage to be resolved through the strategy of redeeming a bad marriage by replacing it with a better one and *Under Capricorn* invites this expectation; however, since the film rethinks the terms of marriage altogether, revealing the conditions that create deadlock and paralysis, the strategy of substitution and remaking the lady in a more acceptable form is rejected. *Under Capricorn* revives the potential of the couple as a democratic partnership that was initially founded on a negation of social protocol and a declaration of passion and mutual respect. The film's commitment to a future that will move beyond the past might account for *Under Capricorn*'s use of other generic sources, like the Western.

The Western is the genre that contemplates settlement and the founding of the democratic community. It looks to the past as a way of dramatizing the birth pangs of a new social entity, or elegizing lost potential. *Under Capricorn* uses the body of the melodrama but frames it within the iconography of the Western. The opening shot is of a Western town, circa 1831, with dirt roads, horses, a small embryonic town centre composed of frontier town buildings with swinging saloon-style doors. The men wear modified cowboy hats and the community includes men like Flusky, successful horse ranchers with land claims business concerns. The film should more logically begin with an introduction to the gothic house Minyago Yugilla (translated as "Why weepst thou", the cri-de-coeur of melodrama) where most of the film takes place. Instead it begins and ends by incarnating the spirit of a Western, using its visual motifs, which are far from the dark emotional tenor of the melodrama and its oneiric diegesis. *Under Capricorn* begins with the theme and spirit of beginning anew, through the awkward arrival of the new governor/Cecil Parker, seen from the bemused point of view of his nephew. It starts by introducing a community still searching for an identity.

Australia or New South Wales is the new frontier, a community with one foot rooted in its colonial past and one in the future. The creed that defines New South Wales as a pioneer town proclaims the promise of a fresh slate—one's past can be erased. *Under Capricorn* is a mirror world of second chances, where one can tame both the wilderness without and the savage within. It is a country which offers the possibility of self-making and freedom. One can work off one's criminal debt and begin anew, as the banker states, "...be in a chain gang in January and drink champagne in July". Prisoners "unjustly convicted" are renamed emancipists and the community abides by the democratic promise that hard work results in upward

The breakfast scene: Mr. and Mrs. Flusky and Adare



2. Mario Ponzi made this comment in reference to *Europa '51* "Due o tre cose su Roberto Rossellini", *Cinema e film* 1 No. 2 Spring 67, p. 25.

mobility thus eliminating the inequities of class privilege and birthright. This is true in theory, however, in practice, the prejudices of the old country are imported and enhanced in the ruling class. The well-meaning governor, the 'new marshall' like his nephew Charles Adare, are privileged newcomers who wish to import the old world and impose its order in the new one. Government House is militaristic, exclusionist, anti-democratic and class-structured. Taming the savages, imposing the law, is taken as a literal concern in a country which retains its identity as a formal penal colony. Adare's initial encounter with Sam Flusky demonstrates these stark social conditions with startling directness. Adare is introduced to Flusky in the opening sequence in the bank and follows him to the land claims office as Flusky has proposed a business opportunity. Enroute, Flusky stops by the jail cells to choose new servants from a group of inmates who will buy their freedom by working in his household. Flusky checks their mouths and limbs as he might his horses, threatening them with pink slips—a return ticket to jail—if they misbehave. He makes good on his threat by ordering his current group to be picked up and returned. The possibility of freedom and civilization is precariously close to that of reincarceration and enslavement. Despite the rule of letting "bygones be bygones", emancipists are not welcomed socially in Government House (the Governor equates the term "emancipist" with "convict"). The promise of a new society is fragile and tenuous—one false move or brush with the law and one's history is recalled instantly. The past, repressed and never spoken in New South Wales, always haunts it.

At the heart of the struggle for settlement and legitimization dramatized through the Western, is the woman. Her domesticity and civilizing influence define the home, the hearth of the new community. *Under Capricorn* plays with this expectation in its elaborate build-up to Henrietta's introduction which is Bergman's star entrance. Despite Flusky's success as a wealthy rancher/landowner (he is described as owning the best stud in the colony and is admired for his ability to accumulate land claims), he is a social outcast. This is in part attributable to his dubious past and brusque manner (a rejected shrunken-head salesman calls him "murderer") but his stigma is also linked to his wife's 'illness'. The male leaders of the bourgeoisie, willing to exploit Flusky's donations, will come to dinner, however the house is taboo to their wives who refuse to enter it. The dinner sequence begins by deliberately invoking the intensity of the horror film; the driver who delivers Adare to the estate is too frightened to wait, claiming "something queer" about the place. The wife's difference and the aura of trauma that characterize Minyago Yugilla pose an obstacle to Flusky's claims for legitimacy and communal acceptance. His ability to finally rid himself of his past depends on a civilized home and a presentable wife. The dinner party sequence elaborates this theme with great relish. Adare's decision to investigate alone before ringing the bell uncovers a bourgeois household through the looking glass, at once familiar and estranged. Milly the housekeeper/Margaret Leighton is first introduced receiving orders from an excited Flusky in a context that seems too intimate for an employer/employee exchange, and is then seen whipping the kitchen staff (literally) into shape for the dinner party. As each man arrives, a thin excuse is made for the wife's absence. The mobile camera offers Adare's point of view, which guides one through the scene up

to the moment when the camera leaves his earshot to witness Flusky's concerned whispered order to Milly "not to let her come down", answered by Milly's complicit "I won't". This fear of allowing his wife to be seen precedes Henrietta's entrance. The camera moves along the table, registering each guest's turned head, accompanied by sudden total silence, finally reaching Flusky who turns to see what has caught his guests' complete attention and stopped all conversation (his surprise emphasized through an abruptly arrested camera). There is a cut to a close up of bare feet and a tilt up the body reveals a once-fashionable dress topped by Bergman's unadorned face, her disheveled hair matching her frayed costume. Although the hostess is clearly drunk and in a condition of disarray, Bergman/Henrietta conveys a regal charm, intelligence and dignity. She offers two incisive observations, one regarding Adare's weakness, his poor horsemanship (she remembers him as "the only Adare who was a bad horseman" and for having lamed a favourite horse, "Sam never forgave you") and one regarding her marriage and its veil of secrecy ("Nobody knows about Sam and me..."), which precipitates her sudden discomfort and need to leave the room. Logically Henrietta should request that her husband escort her, but instead she asks Adare. The scene is capped with her offscreen cry for help, again to Adare, to remove something fearful from her bed. Adare enters her room and cannot find anything, nevertheless he humours her and pretends to shoot at what has frightened her. Henrietta's introduction lends credence to the community's reluctance to sanction the household. Her illness and delusions (her alcoholism alone is a reflection of transgression as it is a masculine vice) and her appearance as a parody of the small town society hostess stigmatizes Flusky and denies him his rightful place in the community, undoing his attempts to gain friendship and acceptance. In *Under Capricorn*, the concerns of the Western—the male's struggle to be socialized and to establish a valid place in the embryonic democratic community—crosses paths with the gothic. The wife's state of distress, the inertia of the marriage, the trauma that haunts the couple, is placed against the male's struggle for legitimization and recognition. The past manifests itself through Henrietta, despite Flusky's (and the community's) desire to suppress it.

The Freudian melodrama focuses its critique of marital relations in the present, through its identification of a rupture that took place in the past, in the transition from romantic courtship to marriage. The passion and sexual energy that ignite the couple's relationship are suddenly threatening to the husband who must secure fidelity (and the threat is aggravated in a liaison between members of different social classes). The genre's preoccupation with this rupture is an attempt to understand why marriage, initially so potentially liberating, becomes a reality of unspoken resentments, blockages and alienation. The narrative present of *Under Capricorn* is defined by the protagonists' inability to effectively act or speak freely. Henrietta is deteriorating and her husband is blind to what is destroying her. The action that has initiated the problematic has taken place many years before. Hitchcock's challenge is to dramatize a narrative that is marked by interiority, offering clues to its enigmas through partial confessions and subjective memories of events in the past. He employs a distinctive style to register internal non-verbalized expression. The film is characterized by a sense of enclosure and investigative movement, dramatized by long takes and the camera's restless movement



After the ball: Flusky confronts Henrietta about her relationship with Adare.

within confined spaces (predominantly within the Flusky house). The effect conveys an oneiric quality, suited to the film's internal descent into the unspoken terrain of past and memory. In the memory/confession monologues, Hitchcock refrains from interjecting a descriptive dramatization of the story being remembered. He could have interrupted Flusky's memory with images of young Hattie Considine riding over a fence or visualized the ride to Gretna Green or the shooting of Dermot. Instead the film relies on the performance of the protagonists, accommodated by the long takes and the camera movement around them. (Chabrol comments on how the camera "hugs" the characters more and more closely. Rohmer/Chabrol, pg. 102). It is almost as if the camera's untiring pursuit and scrutiny of the characters in their enclosed private world will somehow reveal aspects of their personalities that have been guarded and concealed.

In part, the melodrama lends itself to a form of expressionism that Hitchcock continued to perfect and refine from his work at the UFA studios in Weimar Germany. *Mise-en-scène* fills in expression and explanatory information beyond that which is offered through performance. Desire, blockages and insecurities are detailed through the use of décor, costume and spatial relationships. Scenes are carefully colour coded, mostly in varying shades and tones of blue, which add to the surreal, not fully conscious sense of experience being presented. Various entry points—windows and balconies—are traversed by the camera or by the potential lover Adare, but are barriers that the husband cannot cross. Significance is given to trau-

matized spaces like Henrietta's bed, haunted by crimes of the past and present. Hitchcock uses the staircase in classic melodramatic fashion, to indicate the frequent precipitous emotional rises and falls experienced by the characters (the couple's cathartic physical expression of reconciliation takes place midway down the stairs). Similarly, day and night sequences are used to pattern advances and minor victories against setbacks and the tensions and anxiety that more readily emerge at night. The use of the wind or the roar of the storm punctuating the scene where Milly attempts murder, the hyperbolic characterization of Milly (or the troupe of bizarre servants whom Henrietta hopelessly tries to train), the mounting violent outbursts that Flusky releases after long sequences of his controlled repression of emotions are all examples of the expressive logic of the gothic dreamscape, of an internal reality explored in the film.

The film's initial enigma is Sam Flusky. Both Adare and the governor vaguely recall his name, he is called a murderer in a scene early in the narrative and he is brusque and unforthcoming. Flusky appears uncomfortable with language, social repartee and decorum, until the scene in his house following the unsuccessful dinner party when he offers Adare a lengthy account of his courtship and marriage as a means of explaining his wife's present condition. This is given as a token of friendship for the kindness Adare has shown Henrietta. Flusky's revelation is presented in a series of long takes, where the camera tracks laterally to accompany the two men strolling on the porch. The walk is punctuated by two vertical crane

shots, which offer a perspective independent of either man's range of view, and are used as visual commentary. Given the introduction of New South Wales as a place where past history is taboo, where memory is discouraged and personal information is not willingly shared, the scene is given a particular significance. Flusky's memory of better times offers partial clues to his understanding of his wife's present state. He remembers Henrietta in her glory days of strength, courage, physicality and her awakened sexuality. Flusky recalls that "he taught her to ride" and when "she would go at a fence like it had the kingdom of heaven on the other side of it". Henrietta is aligned with an activity by which the men in the film are judged—Adare lames horses and Dermot is described as a "hard rider, the only good thing about him". Flusky speaks of Henrietta lovingly, with respect and adoration, describing her as an angel with whom he would not have dreamed of making love. He is elusive about the crime and describes the subsequent breakdown in their marriage in terms of repression and denial, "There was nothing to talk about that we were willing to talk about. What is it they say in the Bible? A great gulf fixed...". Flusky also makes reference to his assumption that "she missed her own sort, though she never mentioned it", which hints at Flusky's insecurities regarding the class difference between them, an important aspect of the 'great gulf fixed'. As Flusky continues to muse "I just wish I knew what to do" and Adare suggests "Why don't you send Lady Hattie home...?" their voices trail off and the camera leaves them, rising up to the balcony where Henrietta stands, now undressed in her nightclothes, with her hair windblown, naturalized, as if outside of a specific time or place. The camera's initiative to leave the men and rest on Henrietta contrasts the men's assumptions regarding what troubles her, what she might want or what is best for her with a contemplative woman excluded from the discussion regarding her welfare. The second crane follows Flusky's articulation of his keen awareness of Adare's status as a gentleman, which he admits having attempted to exploit as bait for the local ladies. He goes on to praise Milly's efforts, "I don't know what we would have done without her", and the two men end their discussion with plans to get Henrietta riding again. As Flusky tells Adare, "She did seem to take a fancy to you", the camera cranes up to reveal Milly preparing a drink. The moment is the first to implicate Milly in Henrietta's 'weakness', and is used to punctuate Flusky's pronounced insecurities regarding class distinctions and his wife's faithfulness, her missing her own sort and having taken a fancy to Adare, which will continue to intensify as Adare's involvement grows. Flusky's decision to invite a gentleman as a ruse to entice the ladies in part extends to his wife. In a strange way he is testing her fidelity from the start, and will repeatedly comment on Henrietta's preference for Adare over himself. The upward crane movements between the lateral tracks underline the insecurity by giving a visual form to the distance (the gulf) that separates the couple.

Flusky's ambivalence towards his wife is evident in his fluctuations between moments of genuine concern for Henrietta and outbursts of resentment often nurtured by his anxieties regarding class status and distrust of his wife's devotion to the marriage. What he wants is not entirely clear. On a conscious level, Flusky seems to want to help Henrietta get well, and he seems to genuinely care for her. He is also struggling to establish a place for himself in the community which is problema-

tized by his wife's alcoholism and hallucinations. On the other hand, less consciously, the exposure of her 'illness' (to the community, via the doctor or the dinner party) ensures her loss of status, and her loss of access to her class, a class to which Flusky never belonged and one which remains a supreme threat to him (as evidenced at the ball). It is as much in Flusky's interest to demonstrate his wife's disqualification 'to be the lady', to keep her powerless and without keys as it is for Adare to remake her, to reincarnate her so that she can reclaim her legitimate place in Irish society, to suit his only social qualification as a gentleman. In this sense, Flusky's motivation is similar to Devlin's strategy in *Notorious*: as Andrew Britton notes "Devlin seeks to turn Alicia/Ingrid Bergman into a whore so that he can despise her for being one". Similarly, Devlin's refusal to trust Alicia endangers her life (he also imagines that Alicia's slow poisoning is a result of her relapse into alcoholism). Henrietta's illness robs her of her class affiliation which is what Flusky perceives has threatened the marriage (she missed her own sort). Flusky's curious domestic helplessness, his willfully obscured vision and passive complicity—he cannot see what a newcomer like Adare or the new 'gentleman' servant Winter see plainly, straight away—is commented upon by the camera, as is his ambivalence and his sense of social exclusion. His inability to voice his resentment is fully spoken and acted out by Milly who functions as a sort of alter ego, giving voice and shape to Sam's subjective fears. The inappropriateness of Milly's sovereignty in the Flusky household—she wears the keys and displays her contempt for her mistress—troubles Adare and Winter but is condoned by Flusky. Flusky's allegiance to Milly is based on their shared values, class and view of social inequality. Flusky was once a groom and the banker still describes him as someone who works "like a galley slave". Both Flusky and Milly articulate their disregard for gentlemen (when Flusky hires Winter he warns him that his credentials as a gentleman "is not very good currency around here"), both distrust Adare's boldness with Henrietta and both humiliate Henrietta publicly. Milly's staged display of the wine bottles in the kitchen is calculated to discredit Henrietta with her household staff and is intended to undermine her confidence, just as Flusky's public disruption at the ball robs Henrietta of her sense of pride and accomplishment. Flusky defends Milly's rude refusal to help Henrietta to bed the night Adare enters her room and hesitates to accept Adare's word over Milly's. "Because you're a gentleman? So's Winter a gentleman... They all stand together against the outsiders, the trash, the scum of the world, against Sam Flusky for one... a common servant, the old convict... Then there's my wife too... she's a lady. Ladies and gents look at things their own way... Well maybe Miss Milly and I look at it another way..." Milly, unlike Adare, is given the same privilege accorded the couple, a lengthy stream of consciousness monologue which acts as a catalyst to spur Flusky to recover possession of his wife in a manner that allows him to announce his frustration and animosity toward a group from which he feels excluded. Milly reinforces Flusky's beliefs and anxieties regarding class difference ("they made a handsome couple... I suppose it's in the blood...") and emphasizes the sexual desire motivating Adare's commitment to Henrietta. She sums up her musings with her recollection of their intimacy in Henrietta's bedroom knowing that her insinuations provoke Flusky's worst fears—that Adare enjoys a physical intimacy with Henrietta long ago denied the



Henrietta pleads with Adare to exonerate her husband.

couple. The monologue is punctuated by Flusky silently weaving back and forth into the frame, and Milly's coup de grace is followed by a close-up of Flusky's contorted face. Milly literally provides Flusky with the language he needs, and he reiterates her words at the ball when he refers to Adare as "the young spark". By the time Flusky returns home from the ball and finds Adare and his wife alone, he explodes with an outburst of crude language long suppressed, calling Adare Henrietta's "fancy man" and referring to his wife as "you trash". The scene ends with Winter's query, "Is Miss Milly going to stay after all?" a remark which indicates the link between Flusky's rage and Milly's incitement. Flusky's second outburst follows Henrietta's admission that she confessed to having killed Dermot. Flusky interprets Henrietta's confession to be a ruse conceived to arrange her return to Ireland with Adare. Flusky claims that he will not trade in his hard-earned new identity "to be a stable boy again", and expresses his resentment at having sacrificed years paying for Henrietta. The scene ends with Milly comforting Henrietta with a suggestion that she have something to drink. Milly's slow poisoning, which is accelerated by the turn of events, is presented consistently as an acting out of Flusky's

fears and rage. After spying Milly pouring the sleeping medication into her drink, Henrietta's accusation is to Flusky, "You've sent this woman here to kill me...", interpreting Milly's actions to be an expression of her husband's murderous intentions.

Adare's crusade to inspire Henrietta's recovery and to court her is, in part, motivated (like Flusky's) by his need to establish himself in the community and to prove himself to the Governor, his uncle. Adare exploits Flusky's insecurity and plays the trump card of the class position he shares with Lady Henrietta. Her error of having married beneath her (evident in her resulting state of illness, alcoholism and withdrawal from society) does not undo her rightful membership to her class. In the scene where Charles unwraps a mirror to reflect "Lady Henrietta Considine", he initiates the process of annulling her marriage. (The Governor does the same when he meets her at the ball—he refers to her by the name of her youth, Hattie Considine, a name which gains her entry to the ball). Adare's skills are opposite to Flusky's: he is articulate and is socially at ease but he can also appear flippant and takes liberties that are not always welcome or appropriate. When Adare and Henrietta admire her image in the new mirror, he kisses her and

Henrietta notes disapprovingly that his kiss wasn't very respectful. This gratification of his desire intensifies later on, along with the competition played out between Flusky and Adare. In the scene following Henrietta's humiliation in the kitchen, she suffers a setback and does not come down for dinner. The camera registers her untouched dinner setting as Flusky places her regression in the context of his insecurities, telling Adare "You've seen more of her than I have... Not a sound... not even for you". Whereas Flusky passively waits, Adare responds actively, crossing the divide that separates the couple by climbing into Henrietta's room through the balcony. Henrietta is in a semi-stupor from alcohol and depression and resigns herself to failure by instructing Adare "to go back home and tell them I died". Adare takes advantage of her condition and indulges his needs, kissing her despite her objection, "this is all wrong, this is not the way of it". He continues by subtly undoing her present status reminding her of her place of birth, of the "honour of Ireland", of what was left behind. When Adare calls Milly to help her mistress to bed, Milly refuses, stating rudely that "it looks like it's your job" (a comment echoing Flusky's sentiments). The scene ends with Adare moving to shut the window and seeing Flusky alone, excluded, staring up from the level below. The scene concisely establishes a number of things: Adare's offer to help Henrietta does not excuse his self-indulgence and although Milly too boldly speaks her mind, she is also speaking for Flusky, and the camera connects the two and comments on the dynamic of the relationships through a registration of space. The bedroom is an eroticized place where marital sexuality has been displaced symbolically by the shrunken head. Adare enters the room freely and relates to Henrietta sexually as a romantic lover, comforting her physically with caresses and touch, in a way that Flusky cannot. Flusky is isolated on a lower visual plane and will only finally enter his wife's bedroom near the end of the film, on the brink of their reconciliation. His insecurities are visualized spatially.

Adare plans the ploy of the invitation to Government House as a means of encouraging Henrietta to resume a particular social identity in a manner that will exclude Flusky, as he is aware that Flusky is unwelcome at Government House and uncomfortable in social situations. Adare is annoyed at the Fluskys' new intimacy at the breakfast table after Henrietta has successfully taken charge of her kitchen and has begun to regain control of her domain. Flusky's offering of the keys to his wife—"to be worn as Milly did"—reflects the beginnings of a new expressivity in the marriage and Adare quickly counters with the offer to escort Henrietta to the ball. Flusky acknowledges the class intimations of Adare's logic with his comment, "Let the cobbler stick to his last". The scene concludes with Henrietta dictating a letter to Adare's sister, her old friend Diana, expressing her gratitude to her brother, and her fondness for him (and the film has never supported any evidence that the relationship means anything more to Henrietta). The camera leaves the two and slowly moves around the room, as if looking for Flusky, finally catching him exiting the room, unnoticed by all but the camera eye.

Hitchcock subtly dramatizes the competitive tensions felt by Flusky and Adare on the night of the ball. The scene begins with a close-up on Flusky's gift to Henrietta, a collar of rubies concealed in his hands behind his back. Both men are then paralleled in the frame, awkwardly aware that they both await one princess. Annoyed that Henrietta asks her husband, "How

do I look Sam?", Adare exploits his ability with language to demean Flusky, mocking his simple "All right" with his litany of "the lakes of Killarney are all right" etc., and "Come, Sam, you can do better than that". He hastily belittles Flusky's offer of jewelry by flaunting his expertise of 'good' taste, "Do you want your wife to look like a Christmas tree?" and hurries Henrietta out, leaving Flusky behind, alone, clutching his unwanted gift. Adare uses his social abilities to deprecate Flusky, to establish an exclusive club that will shut him out.

Adare's reconstruction of Henrietta as a society lady of class and breeding is ultimately deemed inauthentic, because it is an image she rejected long ago, through her marriage to Sam Flusky. Henrietta expresses her bewilderment and disappointment with her husband's hurtful rudeness, but her revelatory monologue to Adare suggests that triumph at a society ball is the antithesis of the declaration of protest made through her elopement with Sam Flusky. Adare's rationalization of Flusky's behaviour, "He's jealous... He knows he's inferior to you and it fills him with hatred..." sparks Henrietta's defense of her husband and inspires her to explain the meaning of a union that was rooted in a defiance of the strictures of class and familial loyalties. Henrietta's lengthy uninterrupted monologue is, in many ways, the structural heart of *Under Capricorn*. The sequence celebrates Bergman's stature as the film's star (it is her vehicle) by foregrounding elements of the persona that reinforce Henrietta's renewed strength and integrity. It is as if the transgressive woman who haunts the gothic, the woman who deliberately challenges social conventions like *Rebecca* or Alice Alquist, is resurrected in a form that explains and validates her *raison d'être*, thus defusing the genre's movement towards her banishment and annihilation.

Henrietta's declaration early on that "Sam is a part of me and I'm part of Sam, forever and ever" demolishes Adare's hope for a relationship with Henrietta. The expectation that Adare will substitute for an unworthy husband is slowly expunged by Henrietta's description of Sam Flusky and her valuation of the precise traits that Adare lacks: his ability to share the physical joy and pleasure of horseback riding and Flusky's respect for her and self-constraint, "the silent and respectful" groom who rode five paces behind and Henrietta's "shivering with delight because I knew of the love he had for me". By placing Adare in the foreground of the image during this part of Henrietta's disclosure, one is able to appreciate Henrietta's profound love for Flusky while witnessing the crushing disappointment Adare experiences simultaneously. Henrietta describes her role in the courtship as being active; she takes the initiative, by responding to his admission, "this is killing me" with her desire to save him. Henrietta then takes the jewels "brought for the viceroy's ball" and finances their escape (by rejecting the accoutrements of a society lady). The camera at this point isolates Henrietta, underlining her complete immersion in the pleasurable memory of the elopement and the active part she takes in its execution. She continues to describe her physical and eroticized pleasure in terms of the "rough ride to Gretna Green" and her complete satisfying weariness. Henrietta's description of Dermot's shooting not only highlights her masculine activity of reaching for "the horse pistol" and shooting Dermot dead, but also expresses her antipathy for the brother who arrives to punish her for disgracing the family, and her sense of complete justification in killing him. Bergman delivers these lines without any hint of regret or sadness, as if her Medea-like act of

murder was a necessary part of her rejection of the unjust prejudices harboured by her family and society against choosing a lover from a lower social class. Adare's only interjection in her confession is his question regarding how Henrietta supported herself the years she awaited Flusky's release, which leads to her admission of almost succumbing to the squalor and misery around her. Clearly she is intimating prostitution and Henrietta goes on to express that it became a part of her, so much so that she still sometimes yearns to sink to those depths. Interestingly, this is how Hitchcock describes the dilemma of *Under Capricorn*, as a story about a woman who "degraded herself for the sake of love" (Truffaut, 137), and Adare pronounces this a sacrifice that extends beyond any man's worth. Bergman's performance doesn't make those judgments; Robin Wood's reading of the moment when Henrietta speaks of her degradation touching her bared neck, correctly identifies it as one that expresses Bergman's sensuality. (p. 320) Henrietta's confession of her 'degradation' "for the sake of love" is significantly prefaced by her electric, assured telling of events which declare the rightness of her acts, spoken as a defiant protest, without guilt. Those moments vivify the courageous vital woman recalled lovingly in Flusky's monologue, and Henrietta's speech provides the visual accompaniment to Flusky's memory. The lengthy privileging of Henrietta's voice undoes the problem of the gothic, where the woman is spoken for, her voice buried. The vow of silence was given in accordance to Flusky's request, it was not Henrietta's choice. The reclamation of Henrietta's voice is the evidence of her recovery, not the remaking of a lady whose success is measured at a ball. The 'lady' was purposely relinquished long ago.

The stormy night Milly decides to murder Henrietta begins with a scene in the Flusky parlour after the doctor has left. Milly is seated near Flusky, darning, and they appear as a married couple. Flusky's decision to accompany his wife on her journey takes Milly by surprise, as it indicates a commitment to Henrietta that overrides his concern for his fragile identity. Milly responds by invoking the same argument Flusky uses, "You're somebody here, you'll be nobody there..." pleading openly "stay with me... I'll work to the death for you". Milly's comments are appropriate to a romantic couple and are placed within a context; she has been treated like a wife for many years. She is a domestic housekeeper who shares the parlour with her employer in the evening, darning his clothes, "bringing him something hot", sharing his opinions and values. If she is openly pleading "stay here with me" it is because she's been given reason to believe a relationship exists between them. Milly's consequent decision to hasten Henrietta's death (sensing the beginnings of a rupture in her relationship with Flusky) is, in part, pathetic, because she has been playing the role of a devoted wife; as she later explains "I was good enough to work and slave for you..." Henrietta subtly acknowledges Milly's justification of her actions and correctly frames it in terms of love, asking her "Are you in love with him?"

The beginning of Flusky's potential recovery of his relationship with Henrietta is visualized when he answers Henrietta's call for help and finally enters her bedroom. Unlike Adare, Flusky doesn't humour her and is never patronizing. He insists that she confront her fears and see for herself, which is what Henrietta finally does. After Flusky leaves her room Henrietta stands up and faints when the shrunken head is exposed in a rapid track towards it. This is followed by the camera moving

towards the window (which is reminiscent of the earlier scene which found Flusky outside below the bedroom) and then a dissolve onto a close up of Bergman's face. The half-lit face with a tear in her eye is an extraordinary shot, one that summarizes the essence of the gothic. The question posed by the name of the house, "Why weepest thou?" is answered by this shot which articulates Henrietta's fear that her husband is trying to kill her... As already mentioned, when Henrietta witnesses Milly's actions she calls for Sam, accusing him of sending "this woman here to kill me".

Henrietta and Sam's complete reconciliation, emphasized by their physical closeness, is based on their joint decision to put an end to sacrifice. The underside of self-abnegation is the resentments it feeds, and the resulting tensions and distrust that fester. By pointing to a future beyond renunciation, secrecy and sacrifice, the film lays to rest the concerns of the gothic. *Under Capricorn* rejects the terms of bourgeois marriage, and calls for open communication and a mutual recognition of what both partners want and need for their own fulfillment. The accidental shooting of Adare recalls that of Dermot, and they are in some ways similar in that both men share the same class position and values and act to sabotage Henrietta's relationship with Flusky. The legal exoneration of Flusky in the film's dénouement is necessary to the couple's ability to take their place in the new community clear of any shadows from the past. The film's final images are almost Fordian in the way the couple are framed at a low angle against the open sky and the waving flag, looking towards a fresh start in a new country.

The French New Wave critics' championing of *Under Capricorn*, naming it in their all-time best list in 1958 (*Cahiers du Cinéma*, No. 90) makes complete sense. They valued the film's creative interpretation of generic conventions and mise-en-scène filmmaking, and its belief in redemption. This notion of redemption extends beyond its religious/Christian connotations. The film is redemptive in the way it foresees recovery, closing with a hope for a future that not only corrects the shortcomings of bourgeois society, but rejects its fundamental tenets altogether. The film's subversive celebration of the transgressive woman (who actively pursues her desires, at the cost of murder and prostitution if necessary) made vital by Bergman's performance, is sadly ignored by feminists unwilling to unseat Hitchcock from his title of master misogynist. A number of critics have related *Under Capricorn* to a variety of other Hitchcock films. It has been compared to *The Paradine Case* in terms of the lady and groom motif and the theme of confession, to *Blackmail* and *The Manxman* in terms of its recognition of class difference, to *Rebecca*, *Suspicion*, *Spellbound* and *Notorious* in terms of the woman's melodrama, to *I Confess* in terms of confession, to *Lifeboat*, *Rope*, *Rear Window* in terms of its use of enclosed space and even to *Vertigo* in terms of the protagonist's need to reconstruct the woman into an image that will assuage his troubled ego. These placements of the film within Hitchcock's oeuvre are valid; however, *Under Capricorn* stands alone in the unique attitude it takes towards the couple. The film's reconception of romance and marriage allows for a resolution full of possibility. *Under Capricorn* is a work marked by transition—it looks beyond the gothic towards a post-war world in need of reinvention.

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I CONFESS

Photographs of People Speaking

by V.F. Perkins

"We were to consider... some cases and senses... in which to *say* something is to *do* something; or in which *by* saying or *in* saying something we are doing something. This topic is one development... in the recent movement towards questioning an age-old assumption in philosophy... that to say something... is always and simply to *state* something." J.L. Austin, *How to do things with Words*, Oxford University Press, 1980, p. 12.

In the Truffaut book, various reasons are proposed for the failure of *I Confess* (1953). Hitchcock suggests that there was a lack of humour and subtlety in the screenplay that gave an effect of heaviness. He identifies some local difficulties too: the linguistic contrivances involved in setting an English-speaking movie in French Canada, and the problems arising from Warner Bros.' last-minute insistence on putting Anne Baxter into the female lead in place of the Swedish actress, Anita Bjork. Those of us who enjoy and admire Anne Baxter, here and elsewhere, may be inclined to dispute the justice of comparing an actual performance with an imagined one, but we should also bear in mind the habitual precision of Hitchcock's casting.

Truffaut and Hitchcock seem agreed that the film suffered because non-Catholic audiences were unsympathetic to the plot's founding conceit—that the sanctity of the confessional would bind a priest to silence even when he found himself suspected of killing and at risk of execution in place of a murderer known to him through confession. I am not a Christian but I do not experience the difficulty suggested, and I know of no evidence that *I Confess* fared better in Catholic than in other territories. Hitchcock and Truffaut are here falling into the same error as those who suppose that male spectators are unable to sympathise with female characters or that the feelings and experiences of white actors must be inaccessible to the imaginations of black filmgoers.

Very early in the film we are with Father Michael Logan (Montgomery Clift) as he hears the confession of the sacristan Otto Keller (O.E.Hasse); Keller says that he has killed the lawyer Vilette (Ovila Legare) who had surprised him in the act of burglary. Since we know of Logan's innocence and Keller's guilt, the film has a difficulty in making it seem that Logan is in danger. Moreover—and this is an aspect that Hitchcock could have altered—the world does not talk



Father Michael Logan (Montgomery Clift) and Otto Keller (O.E. Hasse).



Ruth Grandfort's (Anne Baxter) presence evokes the past.

about Logan with suspicion, or treat him like a murderer. It is only late in the picture, when we reach the theatre of the courtroom, that anyone makes a show of believing him guilty.

Complacency is disturbed however by presenting the villain as an increasingly demonic figure. Starting in a sniveling, shifty kind of pathos Keller develops a mirthlessly teasing fascination with Logan's ordeal and begins to savour the knowledge of his own power. We see the results of his glimpsing the desperate hope that he may enjoy providential protection. He becomes a cousin to Bruno, Robert Walker's wonderful creation in Hitchcock's previous film, *Strangers on a Train*. He has the same appalling flirtatiousness and moral sadism but none of the glamour. Failing to subdue his terror and surmount his cowardice, he remains a colourless lump of corruption; there is little of Bruno's dreadful zest to enliven his malevolence. Keller is interesting to the extent that he is

vile. He is very interesting.

We might regret that Hitchcock and his writers did not trust more to the potency of their villain. A greater respect for Keller's satanic command might have relieved them of the concern to secure each link in the circumstantial chain connecting Father Logan to the crime. The story starts like a murder mystery, with the disclosure of the corpse. It then moves almost directly to the identification of the murderer, giving us the confession that usually concludes a detective story. Nonetheless the narrative continues to be shaped as a mystery, where each step forward is also a step back that brings a new revelation about the events in the past leading up to the victim's death. In the normal way this course would be followed in order to fill out the motivation of the murder, but Hitchcock does not go the normal way. Keller gives reasons for killing Vilette that are tricked out with sentiment and more evidently self-serving than they are plausible. It would

be easier to believe that Keller was driven to homicide as one of Vilette's blackmail victims—since extortion will turn out to have been Vilette's business—than it is to credit his tale of money stolen in order to free his wife Alma (Dolly Haas)¹ from a life of drudgery. But while the film's imagery and its characterisation of Keller encourage speculation, its dramatic action offers no challenge to Keller's repeated claim. Instead the pasts that come into question are those of Father Logan and Ruth Grandfort (Anne Baxter), the wife of a prominent politician.

This procedure was necessary because of the problem latent within the alluring premise of the movie's action. It is wonderful to have the hero menaced and immobilised by the very knowledge that should guarantee his freedom; but in order to bring him into danger it is necessary to construct another strand of plot to trace a history that will cause him to be accused of just that crime of which he has received the killer's confession. The priest has to have had a connection not with the killer alone but with the victim too, and the connection needs to have been such as to provide a colourable incentive to murder. Beyond that he must be without other means of establishing his innocence (such as an alibi) while the police investigation must encounter nothing that directs it to the real killer. All this while satisfying the requirements of the Production Code Administration which was professionally touchy in its protection of Catholic interests. A tall order.

The writers (Hitchcock of course included) are remarkably successful in drawing the noose that snares the priest. The middle section of the film is constructed as the gradual exposure of the connection between Logan and Ruth Grandfort. Their relationship is presented to us as a puzzle as soon as Ruth enters the movie. On the morning after the murder and Keller's confession to Logan, the detective on the case Inspector Larue (Karl Malden) catches sight of a meeting on the pavement outside Vilette's house. He is curious to see Logan hurry Mme Grandfort away from the scene but he is too distant to hear her response to the news of the murder: 'He's dead? I can't believe it. We're free.' Thereafter the circumstances that make this woman think of herself and the priest as jointly liberated by Vilette's death are unravelled in tandem with the development of the police case against Michael Logan.

Although the management of the narration involves a fair number of supplementary contrivances (whereby, for instance, Mme Grandfort can keep abreast of Inspector Larue's enquiries) it is a mark of the ingenuity with which the action is plotted and of the precision with which viewpoint is controlled that the film avoids troubling us with its implausibilities until a late stage, when the case comes to trial. Unfortunately so much effort is invested in nailing down the plot and disguising its improbabilities, that narrative economy and propulsion are sacrificed. Credibility is maintained but sometimes at the expense of interest. No doubt because of the centrality of religion, the movie cannot embrace the extravagance of invention that energises, for instance, *Notorious* and *Vertigo*. A work of genius and a fine picture, *I Confess* has—like many other fine pictures, including some masterpieces—feeble moments and some passages when it plods and it bores. Brief as they are, they do a lot of damage.

While second rank Hitchcock is treasurable in its own right, it also has the great value of showing us what an unlikely achievement first rank Hitchcock is, how delicate are the balances and fine the intuitions on which it depends. The Hitchcock movie is a genre impossible for anyone but Hitchcock and extremely hard to bring off even for him. The weaknesses of *I Confess* are primarily dramatic, and they are incurred largely in pursuit of ambitions in the realm of character and theme.

The screenplay seeks to make a virtue of a necessarily complex plot by developing, within the constraints of a ninety minute span, a large range of secondary roles. These are not the highly coloured bits that appear briefly and delightfully in such films as *North by Northwest* and *The Birds*, but characters whose fates depend on the unwinding of the Logan-Keller affair and who appear throughout the picture with attitudes and aims, frustrations and perplexities of their own. This widening of perspective seems designed to balance the central role, a figure whose interior life could not be articulated, but it also serves to compose an eloquent image of ramification, and an informing sense of the uncontrollable consequentiality not only of deeds—a murder is, after all, predictably laden with consequence for others beside the victim—but also of speech.

If Hitchcock had been working with writers of the calibre of Ben Hecht (*Notorious*), Thornton Wilder (*Shadow of a Doubt*) or Samuel Raphaelson (*Suspicion*) his success might have been more consistent. He might have avoided those flatly explicit moments that turn characters into diagrams, muffling the resonance that is elsewhere achieved through the allusive power of presence and imagery. Willie Robertson, the crown prosecutor (Brian Aherne), is the figure who links the Grandforts to the Larue investigation. In his early appearances he is interestingly loathsome—and one of those many figures through whom Hitchcock expresses his ambivalence towards a familiar model of Englishness. Robertson's vanity far outruns his accomplishments; party tricks are his forte; his arrogance and lack of imagination keep him at his ease even as they display the dullness of his mind. At the trial he becomes the converse of Father Logan, as well as his antagonist, since these traits preserve him from discomfort when professional obligation goes against personal interest, requiring him to harangue his friend Ruth Grandfort as an adulteress. Unfortunately his part in the trial is not (perhaps could not have been) well enough written to make Robertson's opportunism interesting. He seems merely foolish, ineffectually blustering. Since that is not an effect that we can suppose to be intended, it is the actor rather than the character that we turn against.

The problem is in the relation between characterisation and plot. The film cannot afford to recognise how feeble is the case against Logan because its denouement—the exposure of Keller—depends on the jury's reaching a 'not proven' verdict and the judge's expressing a conviction of Logan's guilt. Symptomatically defence procedures hardly exist in the trial as presented. None of the witnesses is cross examined; Logan's attorney is scarcely heard, seen or mentioned. It may

1. Spoto, 1983, p337, says that the name Alma was chosen in the final stages of scripting. We can hardly be expected to ignore Hitchcock's giving his own wife's name to the killer's wife. Deborah Thomas offers interesting reflections on the name, and much else, in her essay on *I Confess* in *CineAction* No. 40, May 1996.

be that Hitchcock's distrust of the machinery of the law went so deep that he saw no conflict between the trial's being a farce and its producing a general execration of the accused. But that viewpoint does not achieve dramatic expression. There are high spots in the trial scenes, some of Logan's evidence and all of Keller's, but elsewhere the action is by moments turgid and unconvincing.

That is because one central point has got muffled in the construction: Logan is striving to protect Ruth Grandfort's secrets as well as Otto Keller's. His silences and equivocations about Ruth are not necessitated by his priestly obligations, since they do not cover information obtained in the confessional, but they crucially extend his vulnerability. It is in relation to Ruth, and not in relation to Keller, that the world believes he has something to hide. Logan knows this, but he will not declare the facts that would expose Ruth as (in wish if not in deed) an adulteress. This dramatically vital matter never reaches articulation with the necessary force or clarity, partly because throughout its first half the film treats the relationship between Ruth and Michael as a mystery. Perhaps we have in *I Confess* a vindication of Hitchcock's regularly stated belief that mystery is hostile to drama.

The weaknesses of the plot create difficulties for our understanding of Hitchcock's design. At the outset we are instructed to accept that a man wearing a cassock will be understood to be a priest. That should stand untroubled as a premise of the action, and it might do if the cassock were then forgotten. However it comes back in a big way when Keller decides to plant it with its unwashed bloodstains in Logan's trunk, and it features largely in the trial. We can place this in the film's scheme to the extent that we can accept that the world about him is so thrilled by the prospect of seeing a priest guilty of murder that it blocks out other possibilities. Part of the film's aim does seem to be to chart the varieties of temperament, role and desire through which the convenience of a disparate group can come to be served by the identification of Logan as Ruth Grandfort's lover and Vilette's killer.

Inspector Larue presents himself as meticulously concerned with every shred of evidence. We can take the film to reflect on the vanity of this self-image in offering us a detective self-esteem as a model of thoroughness and rationality to whom it never occurs that a man in a cassock could be a man in disguise. Perhaps it is Larue's passion for neatness that ensnares him. Hitchcock's imagery defines the moment when his attention is diverted from Keller and fixed onto Logan. The detective is in the middle of questioning Keller, listening to his tale of having discovered Vilette's corpse, when there is a cut—stressed by a chime in Dimitri Tiomkin's score—to a shot that places the back of Keller's head in the foreground and shows that Larue has ceased to look at him. The camera is placed close enough to make a large movement across the screen out of a slight sideways shift of Karl Malden's head. Showing less than half his face, the image is effectively a close-up of his right eye, a gleam as its gaze is drawn to the distance. The answering shot gives us his view through a window as Logan paces back and forth on the pavement beyond Vilette's house. With Keller excluded from its foreground the frame defines Larue's concentration rather than his field of vision. Over this we hear Larue distractedly dismiss Keller, and we cut back to see the murderer move

away out of shot while Larue's gaze, trained on the action outside, ignores his departure. Further inserts break with Larue's eyeline to give us the meeting that he can see but not hear, between Logan and Ruth Grandfort. The sequence ends by returning, through a repetition of the p.o.v. shot as Logan and Ruth move off together, to the image of Larue fixed in thought as if holding the picture of the meeting in his mind to see what it might yield. We must take it that he has been impressed by its two most visible aspects: the radiance of the woman (in what was his, as well as our, first sight of the Anne Baxter character) and Logan's action as he interrupted her movement. He reached out to touch her arm in a gesture of what could seem unpriestly intimacy.

The choice of location contributes subtly to visual expression. The pavement has a slope, not very pronounced but enough that the quality of movement downhill is distinct from that going the other way. As a result it is made palpable that Logan has intervened to reverse Ruth's action, that he knew where she would be going and has turned her away. That is visible to Larue, of course, and is further fuel for his speculations. Larue's concern with Logan is established here, well before grounds are discovered to place a priest at the scene of the crime. From this point his curiosity is directed only to Logan and the woman; it is as if the Vilette investigation becomes the pretext that allows him to pursue his fascination with their relationship. Keller disappears from the case because nothing about him excites the inspector's interest.

The mainspring of the plot that brings Logan under suspicion is the relationship between Ruth Grandfort and her husband. In all that is unspoken it is eloquently staged. Pierre Grandfort is played by Roger Dann. In a weakly written part that needs any help performance can give it, his acting betrays (and may explain) his lack of screen experience. Yet, assisted by his unfamiliarity, he creates telling images of a husband who is successful in the world of public affairs but passes almost unnoticed within his marriage. He has access to his wife's social and sexual services but not to her desire. Lit by cameraman Robert Burks so as to subdue his presence, he hovers in the middle distance offering his help in a soft mutter and commanding the frame no more than he commands the situation. The annoyances and frustrations of finding himself cuckolded by his wife's imagination produce a finely suggestive moment in the scene where he breaks the news to Ruth that her efforts to supply the priest with an alibi have backfired and will result in his being charged with murder. As he leaves her bedroom offering to have her breakfast brought up, he reaches out to close the door on her. It is a gesture that we have seen before, but performed this time with a fresh strength. The camera, catching it as a jailer's move, notices his sense of a new power to keep her in her place.

Ruth Grandfort fuels her romantic fantasy with a range of supposedly desperate or well-meaning notions that serve to cause trouble for Michael Logan and to bind him within her sphere of action. It seems possible that Hitchcock wanted us to understand that Vilette's blackmail had no particular force, except insofar as it was conferred by Ruth's hysteria and her eagerness to make use of his threats as a pretext for involving Logan. It seems quite an exaggeration when she claims 'Pierre's career would be finished; Michael might be unfrocked'; in any case she indicates elsewhere that neither

of these prospects is unthinkable to her. When the priest is about to be accused she goes so far as to trail the idea that they might run away and become fugitive lovers. ('You must do something, they're going to arrest you. Michael, what can we do?... You're not going to let them bring you to trial?... You can't let that happen.')

Hitchcock's direction and Anne Baxter's performance construct Ruth Grandfort as a melodramatist, an emotional arsonist desperate to set a fire or two under passionless men who inflame her the more by their reluctance to become inflamed. She is a cousin to Lisa in *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (Max Ophuls, 1948)—the motives, manner and effects of their confessions are interesting to compare—and, like Lisa, a figure observed with critical sympathy. Her scenes with Logan—where her offers are repeatedly refused or evaded—are notably better written than those with her husband. The film has committed itself to exploring this marriage but not found the means, or given itself the space, to do so with subtlety. It feels as if material filling out its character may have been dropped at the cutting stage. The relationship is developed too much for interest and too little for depth. In the dialogue exchanges we are brought close to the 'photographs of people talking' that compose Hitchcock's own definition of cinematic vacancy.

We can indulge any film in patches when it has to plod us through a stretch of data (as in a montage tour of the rectories following the police investigation) in order to set up the terms of its big scenes. Serious trouble comes when the big scenes are themselves afflicted with plodding. Story problems may again be at the root of the matter. The crucial link between Logan, the Grandforts and Vilette is going to be forged with the news that Ruth Grandfort was under blackmail for adultery as a result of a night spent with the priest. Ruth's eagerness for adultery is made plain. But nothing we are shown or told gives Vilette the exploitable evidence (letters, a photograph, an item of clothing, a witness, anything) that would support his threats.

It is presumably the Breen Office that we should blame—either the one in Los Angeles or the one in Hitchcock's mind. If it had been possible to build a secret affair between the priest and the politician's wife of sufficient length and passion, however far in the past, the film would have had everything required to peg its net of circumstance. And if Pierre Grandfort had tolerated the affair, that would be enough to jeopardize his career in government. Intriguingly, it was during their discussion of *I Confess* that Hitchcock thought to tell Truffaut the tale of a cleric who was involved in a *ménage à trois* with a married couple: 'I wanted to shoot a scene showing the parson making violent love to the young woman while the husband... looked on.' But if Hitch is here trailing a hint about the story behind the story, the film itself allows only that there may have been a night of love when Logan was in ignorance of Ruth's marriage, and before he entered the priesthood. Other suggestions are so comprehensively blocked that there seems to be no basis either for Vilette's blackmail or for the prosecutor's effort to construct a long-standing illicit connection. Since this circumstance is not plausibly established, there is a weak foundation to the scenes that depend on it, and the screenplay is constrained in its efforts to develop them.

Most interesting stories are to some degree implausible.

Part of the critical interest of *I Confess* is due to the ways in which its implausibilities, unlike those of, say, *Vertigo* or *Shadow of a Doubt*, work to compromise its achievement. (Imagine a *Vertigo* obliged to give us scenes that plotted Gavin Elster's relationship with his wife, or his recruitment of Judy into the murder scheme.) In *I Confess* some confusion arises from our not knowing which of its implausibilities we are meant to notice and therefore interpret and which are meant to be left undisturbed as the given material of its tale. This difficulty particularly affects the claims, and our understanding of the motives, of Ruth Grandfort and Otto Keller.

It would be interesting to know whether Hitchcock at any point contemplated the other available development of the narrative premise, where the one who hears the confession is never himself under suspicion but is fated to observe in torment as another innocent is carried towards the scaffold. He might have called it *The Priest Who Knew Too Much*. Maybe the bloodstained cassock is too much of a MacGuffin to sustain a serious tone. Or perhaps the narrative themes of imposture and mistaken identity are better suited to comic than to melodramatic exploration. Their ideal vehicle may not be the story of an anguished priest suffering the obligations of confession, but that of a glib adman mistaken for a non-existent spy.

But if the narrative of *I Confess* can let us down, Hitchcock's treatment is a great compensation since it achieves a power of suggestion and a coherence that is not always evident in the drama.

The opening, behind the credits, presents imagery that is stronger in thematic suggestion than in atmosphere or story content. It is true that for some part of the audience—I have no idea how large a part—the first shot would establish the location in Québec. It presents a view across the St Lawrence of the landmark Château Frontenac. But what it shows is less important than how it looks. It uses the peculiarities of day-for-night filtering to picture the looming mass of a national monument silhouetted to display its strict lines and sharp angles—an architecture of civic debate and judicial arbitration through which the state sets out its claims to authority, permanence and grandeur. Below this rigid presence, there is water; above it, the indeterminate, drifting form of a silvery cloudscape. The shot works with the cloudiness and against the rigidity, as the camera floats forwards and up, without apparent goal, to give the clouds more and more of the frame.

Meanwhile we are hearing perhaps the strangest of all movie theme songs. It sounds like a song. Its tune laments with falling measures and yearns with rising ones. It is delivered as a solo by a high soprano of impressive gifts, and she certainly is singing a lyric—which seems to be in English. But we cannot make out her words. The odd phrase seems to emerge, though never quite into clarity—was that 'Lost in one another's arms'?—only to be swallowed again into an acoustic fog. Heartfelt words are being declaimed, and yet our understanding cannot reach them.

We can suspect a touch of malice here, as Hitchcock enjoyed spoiling the composer Dmitri Tiomkin's occasion for a title song, the like of 'I confess (the love I feel for you)'. *I Confess* came the year after Tiomkin won an Oscar and a fortune, and changed the nature of film scoring, with the ballad 'Do not forsake me, oh my darling' in *High Noon*. It came the

year before, it is said, he offered to write another title number, 'Dial M for Me'. But if there was a tease it was compatible with serious purpose. The lyric we can hear but not apprehend, whose moods are strong but whose statements remain obscure, this complements and shades the meeting in the image of the crisply defined, the publicly asserted, and the intangible.

The solo singer's projection of longing and anguish prepares the centrality of romance and of a woman's feelings to a story ostensibly centred on a priest. It backs the presentation of a title that puts the stress on making rather than receiving confession. *I Confess* gives us confession as an act and as a voicing not as a moral or theological abstraction. The title is a declaration, catching the confessor at the moment of speech, rather than preparing a procedure ('Confession'), a site ('The Confessional') or, as in the French title, an issue ('The Law of Silence').

That choice yields the peculiar form of the title card that follows the Warner Bros logo: *Alfred Hitchcock's "I Confess"*. The first living person we see, once the credits are over, is the director himself. Remote, outlined as a distant but recognisable, solitary and uncommunicative figure at the top of a flight of steps, he crosses the screen in a straight line from right to left. As soon as he has completed his passage there is a cut to a shot that features a Québec sign but also, and more prominently, an arrow pointing across the screen from left to right, bearing the word DIRECTION. The story is starting with a (or with yet another) play on words; we in the anglophone audience can understand that this is a place where direction means a one-way street. Here in French Canada and here on this screen. The point is insisted upon through a firm pattern of alternation between characteristic views of the night city and four different shots of direction arrows, closer and more centred with each repetition, and stressed each time by a stinger in the music.

Having displayed himself in his independence as the director Hitchcock proceeds to show us what it means to be the directed. At the fourth assertion of the arrow image, his camera seems to decide to obey the direction indicated. The effect of decision is created by beginning this shot as if it is to be a plain repetition of the third one, with a static camera that offers a new angle on the sign yet adds no new information. But then the pattern is broken. Instead of cutting again to a fresh location the shot runs on as the camera slides across the sign and turns to push forward into the space ahead of the pointer.

Hitchcock is famously a master of the eyeline shot, where the camera sometimes reports and sometimes transmits the perceptions of a character. No less eloquent, though, is his use of a camera that goes out of its way to declare its independence of human vision. One of many startling examples (and perhaps the most gorgeous) is the crane shot down onto the purloined key concealed in Ingrid Bergman's hand at the beginning of the big party scene in *Notorious*. At its start it mixes human and non-human aspects. It looks down onto a gallery from ceiling height; the remoteness of its view is stressed by placing a grand chandelier in the foreground. The camera sees across the top of this as it takes in a stream of guests descending the curve of a marble staircase. The focus is deep, unselective. But the camera's motion, in its direction and its pace, suggests the view of a human observer. It pans

round and down as if to survey the action on the stairs, and it seems to fix its attention on one guest in particular as she crosses from the bottom step. Then it changes. Discovering the figure of Bergman, the hostess, in the hallway below it edges out and probes down across the space of the foyer, tracing a course and performing a movement unavailable to any human observer. It is vital that the shifting frame can no longer appear to be caused by or to respond to developments within the characters' world. The responsibility for the changing viewpoint is not now discharged in any way onto the events of the fiction. The camera's vision has taken on a goal not evident to us and not shared by any of the actors. Its movement enacts the knowledge of a secret, displayed only at the last when Bergman's hand drops to the centre of the frame, fidgeting open for a moment so that we glimpse its freight. The shot started by announcing its interest in what was on show to all—the performance of guests at a high society reception. It has become an exposure of what is visible to none.

The possibility of declaring the camera's intent, using a change in apparent motivation to give the declaration force, is exploited in the opening of *I Confess*. Offered three ways to go, by the most pointedly pointed arrows there could be, the camera refuses two of them before choosing to follow the third. It traces a course, higher above the roadway than any human eye, determined only by the chain of inference it constructs. It tips in through the open window of an office to reveal a corpse spreadeagled on the floor beside a metal bar, in a diagrammatic image of a crime scene. It tilts up to show the doorway at the far side of the room, with its bead curtain swinging from recent disturbance. It sweeps to the right across the corner of the building and in apparent continuity it presents the sidewalk, and the back view of an already distant, hurriedly retreating figure in a cassock.

In other words it tells us that this priest is in flight from that murder. There is a cut to a more distant shot from across the street. As the priest-figure exits the frame on the right two girls stroll in from the left. Through a dissolve with continuity strongly asserted on the soundtrack we see the man who will come to be named as Keller hurrying down another, an empty, street. He checks behind him furtively then, in a closer shot lit to display his features for the first time, he removes and folds the cassock. The light reveals too the rest of his attire. It is not clerical. He may be a killer but he is no priest.

Evidently this sequence sets down some of the premises of the drama, but it also sets forth the methods and concerns of the direction. It leads us along a chain of inference through which, on the evidence of our eyes (little is given to our ears) we are drawn to three main conclusions: that *x* has been murdered; that he has been murdered by *y*; and that *y* is a priest. It then lets us see that the priest-figure is seen (by the girls) and that he does not see this. Here it reports acts of perception and unawareness, seeming to give the Full Picture not grasped by any of the actors. Finally it overturns a key fact of the story it has just been telling, and so demonstrates its capacity to delude us.

None of the events has been falsified in the manner of *Stage Fright*. Images accurate to the fiction have been strung together so as both to deceive and undeceive the viewer. Direction, we have been shown, has the power to lead us. Of necessity it also has the power to mislead us—to make us

jump to conclusions. Finally it asserts its power to inform us about the ways in which we may be misled. In demonstrating that as a vehicle of truth film language must also be capable of falsehood—and of the demonstration—*I Confess* prepares its ground for what is virtually an inventory of deceptions and concealments within quests for truth and for self-disclosure.

The film takes its cue, thematically, from the strange symmetry in the main device of its plot—confession as an act of speech that binds to silence, an act that conveys at the same time knowledge and paralysis. It is concerned with words and the powers of words spoken and withheld. Hitchcock's ongoing engagement with what can be hidden and exposed—in the image, in the world—is here extended in a particularly systematic way to the operations of speech as the "visible" dimension of thought. The dramatic progression is from the closed spaces of the murder scene and the confessional to spaces increasingly open and apt for public declaration—the courtroom, the streets, and at the denouement an auditorium where everything spoken has to be shouted. With Keller it moves from the murder of Vilette, unseen and unheard within the walls of a small chamber, to the shooting of his wife in a public place crowded with witnesses at a moment when all eyes have been directed to him by her gesture of denunciation.

This moment and this deed are parts of a pattern that compares the secrets of the confessional to the secrets within marriage—two kinds of intimacy. Keller's confession to Fr Logan is immediately followed by his unburdening himself to Alma, and the comparison is stressed through the film's repetition of his words, each side of the dissolve, that Vilette had been 'going to call the police'. The irony is that Keller has complete confidence in Alma. After he has told her about the murder he can say that he is safe because, Logan apart, 'No-one knows'. Yet it is Alma who finally cannot bear the secret

and betrays him. Her hand performs the deed anticipated in her husband's words to Logan: 'Perhaps you will point your finger at me. Perhaps you will say "It's Keller".' Conversely he is never at ease in Logan's knowledge of his crime; he gives himself away to Larue through his assumption that 'the priest talked'.

Both Otto and Alma die asking Logan for words of forgiveness. There is ambiguity in the asking and in the response. Is it the forgiveness of Michael Logan or the church's absolution that they most keenly desire, and do they receive the first as well as the second? Alma dies in the arms of Logan's superior and with no answer to a plea that Logan translates in a flat tone, using the public facts—the meaning of her German words—as a veil for his private thought: 'She says "Forgive me."' Otto Keller dies in Logan's embrace, his eyes gently closed by the priest's hand, with Logan saying the words he needs to hear, but only in their official, impersonal version—the Latin words of absolution.

Hitchcock must have weighed the option of centring the story of *I Confess* on the figure of Otto Keller. In some ways his predicament is more interesting than Logan's; he is able to clear an innocent man only at the cost of his own life. Certainly within the regime of fifties Hollywood his mind and motives are more available to inspection than a priest's. But, staying with the priest as the central figure, Hitchcock's choice was to split the Keller character so as to dramatise alternative responses to guilty knowledge and silence by taking Otto along the path of tormenting glee while developing the figure of Alma as the sharer of his secret to embody the burden of remorse and dread.

The decision to make the couple German follows no dramatic necessity but serves to draw additional attention to matters of language. (One might also cast a Swedish actress as Ruth with this in mind.) A film that begins by punning French against English around the word 'direction' ends by

Anne Baxter and Alfred Hitchcock arrive at a Quebec airport for the premiere of the film.

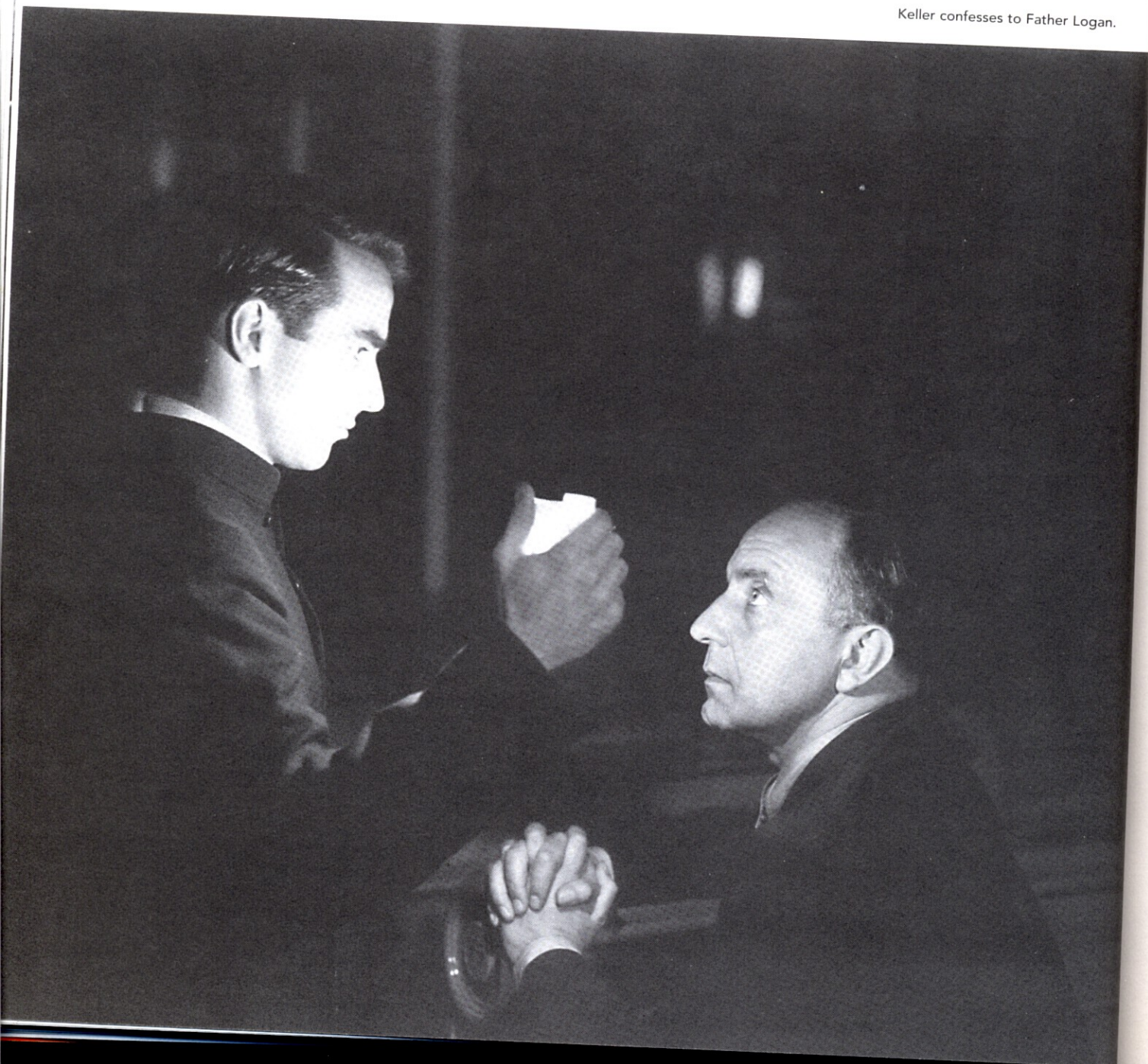


contrasting Alma's plea in German with Otto's 'Father, forgive me' in English that then receives its answer in Latin. Plays on words are made explicit for us at two key moments, first when Ruth Grandfort meets Larue's interrogation with 'You only want everything clear, and I want to clear Father Logan' then when under oath in the witness box Logan finds in 'I can't say' a form of words which both precisely defines his situation and misleads all who hear him. He combines perfect truthfulness with dutiful evasion of the truth he may not speak. Earlier the film has set out innocent, trivial instances of the dependence of speech on the context of understanding by showing us Keller's bafflement at a remark about a bicycle tyre—he needed to have received an earlier message—and a detective's inability to follow a cleric's joke about the moral properties of paint; he needed the habit of talking in parables. The thematic ambition is further marked in the picturing of Pierre Grandfort's profession. Our first

view of him is as a public speaker, debating across the spaces of the Parliament chamber. The image is patterned against scenes on either side where we see Ruth withholding and guarded in private conversation.

Another interesting coincidence in the Hitchcock-Truffaut discussion of *I Confess* is that it provides the setting for Hitchcock's remarks on the productive tension between picture and sound: 'You mean the sound-track says one thing while the image says something else? That's a fundamental of film direction.'² The particular twist in this film is that the image is often used to point up the fact that the sound-track is saying *more* than one thing. 'Good morning' is several times a case in point. These words of polite greeting do not take the form of a statement, but they can say much and they can tell a lie. We see this when the words are exchanged between Ruth and Logan to display the sense of a chance encounter to any who may witness their pre-arranged assign-

Keller confesses to Father Logan.



nation on the Levis ferry. In contrast, when Logan is ushered into the prosecutor's office where Ruth is about to give her evidence, she uses the words 'Good evening, Father Logan' to challenge Larue's pretence that he is introducing them as strangers, to acknowledge a relationship that she had previously used 'Good morning, Father Logan' to falsify.

This is at the start of a sequence in which it is demonstrated that not only words but silence as well may be used to deceive, may have the intent and effect of a lie. In her evidence Ruth reveals that she had several years before made a date with Logan and spent the night with him without letting him know of her marriage. But to invite intercourse was to present herself as (still) single. Her sexual availability amounted to a declaration of her moral availability, in the terms that she knew Logan would take for granted. Since those terms went without saying, their abrogation needed to be spoken.

There is a relationship between the deliberateness of the silence and the calculation implied by the act that Ruth does not acknowledge and that the flashback image does not show her performing—the removal of her wedding ring. Her ringless left hand is most clearly visible in two shots: first when she seeks Michael's kiss and then as she reacts to the words that unmask her as Grandfort's wife. When she later reflects on her history of deception ('I lied before, I should have lied last night.') it seems, since we have not heard her say anything untrue, that she recognises the practice of silent withholding as her particular form of perjury. Ruth's neglect of her obligation to declare herself matches her to Keller. Her inaction, deceitful and self-serving, enters into the film's pattern as the moral inverse of Logan's silence.

One of the challenges that Hitchcock set himself in *I Confess* was to invent ways of filming events that do not happen, and the particular case of speech acts not performed. Ruth's concealment of her marriage occurs throughout the day and night of her tryst with Michael and there is no one moment at which it is available to the camera. Its eye can absorb anything she does, but it cannot make distinctions and priorities between the things it does not record. Negatives that are easily expressed in language, such as 'He did not go to the bank', are almost impossible to film because it is difficult to put us in mind of one particular item among the infinity of things that we are not seeing. A limited solution of the problem is available through construction, by building an expectation so that it may be visibly unfulfilled—the gun does not go off. But to give us the expectation that Ruth will speak of her marriage would create the sense of her attending to that possibility. The voice-over flashback allows Hitchcock to move into a different time-register, that of highly selective memory, and to place Ruth's admission ('I had not told him I was married') in the aftermath of Michael's discovery. Even now, in recalling the events, her impulse is to avoid the issue until it is forced upon her from outside.

The sequence of Ruth's police statement is astonishing; it earns a distinguished place in the distinguished history of voice-over narration. The editing floats us in and out of flashback through a panning wipe/dissolve effect that shades Ruth's recounting of her past with the sense of ecstasy in the release of a long-pent sorrow. What she says has different meaning for each of her hearers—the detective, the public prosecutor, her husband and the priest, her one-time sweet-

heart. She is at the same time giving evidence, telling her story, remembering, reproaching and confessing. On her entry in the first flashback her image is voluptuously distorted by slow motion and gauze effects. Hyperbolic depiction unites with the dislocated voice and the floating transitions to mark the episode with the devices of a dream sequence. The regular returns to Ruth's narrating present are necessary reminders that what she is speaking is ostensibly memory rather than hallucination. It is still clear that her need to proclaim her vision outruns the official purpose of her testimony.

Completely absent is any suggestion of remorse. The content and the manner of her narration convey Ruth's blindness to her own actions. 'Pierre, why must you hear what I'm going to say?' she asks, of a story that she insists on detailing in his presence. The parallel with confession is in many ways overt but is also drawn through subtle formal invention whereby Ruth's speech, like Keller's in church, deprives Logan of his voice.

Her tale covers several years in a few minutes. Like Lisa's in *Letter from an Unknown Woman* it reformulates the events of a man's life by isolating as its key moments the few occasions of his contact with the teller. But there is no equivalent for the ellipses which in Ophüls' film make flashbacks stand for unheard passages in Lisa's letter. There is no dot dot dot effect parallel to 'Night after night I returned to the same spot but you never noticed me until one evening...' While the events of Ruth's account are presented in images and some of these enacted segments make pauses in her narration of—if we were attending to them as pauses—unlikely duration, her verbal account exists in apparent continuity. There are no gaps that the pictures fill. In fact much of what Ruth tells is repeated in what we are shown. The repetitions make her selectivity the more evident, for example in the way she dwells on the early stages of her romance with Logan, giving detail superfluous to the Vilette story. The stress on the partiality of Ruth's view of events has special relevance to the presentation of Vilette because he appears in the film, other than as a corpse, only here in the version of him constructed by Ruth.

A peculiar form of emphasis is created when Ruth's commentary duplicates the content of the image so that a single fact is stated twice. The device is most strikingly used in the account of Vilette's intrusion on the compromising scene. Michael and Ruth have sheltered through the night in a summer house when Vilette approaches. Michael goes to speak to him. 'I was still in the summer house. He didn't know who I was but apparently he knew I was a woman, because he made some remark to Michael.' At this point we cut from a shot of Vilette and Logan outside the gazebo to Ruth within, recumbent and hidden. She gets up and moves out into the light, and we see her taking evident pleasure in a fracas between the two men. In the wake of this, Ruth's narrating voice tells us 'I came out and stood on the steps of the summer house and looked down at him.' This is the moment when Vilette recognises her as Madame Grandfort. The repetition, with the commentary coming after the event, makes it forcefully clear that Ruth chose to present herself to the stranger's view. Her self-display is set in direct contrast both with the conceal-

ment of her marriage and with her later insistence that the world must not know of these events. We have been directed to see how she empowers Vilette by exposing the secret whose suppression she later urges, and whose existence serves to keep Logan on call.

Duplication on the sound track of information conveyed visually draws attention to the substitution of Ruth's voice for any other. The effect is prepared at the start when we see, but only see, the young Michael Logan cup his hands to shout up to his sweetheart from the street below. Thereafter the events are strategically noisy, with a consistent emphasis on acts of speech—none of which we hear. When Pierre Grandfort is seen for the first time he is giving dictation to Ruth as his secretary. Reunited with Ruth after wartime service 'Michael talked and talked'. A storm blows up but it is heard only in music that subjectivises the wind and rain as projections of feeling. Most remarkably it is Ruth's voice that speaks the words 'Good morning, Madame Grandfort' taking over from Vilette's mouthing image when she tells how Vilette recognised her and revealed her to Logan as a married woman.

Apart from Ruth's voice, music supplies the only sound during the flashbacks. At the start the word-veiled song returns, and it floods each moment of romance between Ruth and Michael. In one episode it emerges from its role as emotive background to become the diegetic sound of a girl singer with a band playing as the couple dance on their last night before Michael's departure for battle. The change in its function is marked by the sharpening of aural focus on the voice, so that the lyric becomes more distinctly audible. When the tune is interrupted by the summons to embarkation the strangely fogged singing we have heard since the film's opening is given a point of origin in Ruth's fragmentary but rhapsodic memory of this time of love and parting. (The song is last heard just before Vilette makes his appearance, and I do not hear any trace of it in the rest of the film; it is as if exorcised by Ruth's confession.)

There was another use of flashback earlier in the film. When the two girl witnesses told of having seen a priest leaving Vilette's house on the night of the murder the flashback imagery added nothing significant—despite some new viewpoints—to what had already been shown. But the relatively detached nature of their account was indicated by the repetition of detail, including detail of sound with the noise of footsteps given a realistic presence in the sound mix. That fullness of representation is offered as the sound of memory when the facts recalled are without emotional significance for the rememberers. It sets down a marker against which we may the more immediately hear Ruth's need to validate her own version of a shared history by asserting her own voice, her own sound world, over any other.

As Ruth's narrative ends we see again, from entirely different viewpoints, her meeting with Logan on the morning after the murder. Earlier we heard her greet the news of Vilette's death with 'I can't believe it. We're free'. Now she reports 'I couldn't believe it. I was free.' The change seems to suggest that, for this moment, in this company, she is giving up her claim to exist in a 'we' with Michael Logan. But the whole of her statement has offered him a song of love and longing, more clearly an offering of shared pain than of shared joy.

That is one of the deeper aspects in which Ruth's confes-

sion parallels Otto Keller's. At the point in Ruth's relation which ellides her adultery (sought and probably achieved) we return to the present on the words 'It had stopped raining in the morning' to find her face aglow and her gaze trained on Logan, inviting him to join her in the memory. But he has one hand raised to his face to shield his downcast eyes, in a gesture we recognise. We saw it earlier when he was hearing Keller's confession. For both Otto and Ruth the declaration of guilt offers the means to assert and to further an emotional connection that Logan denies. One of the first things Keller says to the priest, before claiming his right to make confession, is 'You will hate me now'.

Thereafter both Otto and Ruth are insistent in their demands on Logan. They hound him to acknowledge the bonds of intimate knowledge, preferring his reproach or his hatred to his silence and indifferent charity. The interchangeability of their demands is finely pictured in the moments that follow Logan's last rebuff to Ruth when he has met her call for action ('You must do something') with an affirmation of impotence, 'There is nothing we can do.' As Ruth leaves the church she collides at the door with Keller, entering with flowers for the altar, and Keller takes her place in the frame. The camera, having followed Ruth to the door, follows Keller from it in a virtually palindromic arrangement that is bracketed by the genuflections of each of them. Then Logan walks past Keller and Keller pursues him, hectoring him with questions and speculations. The continuities and exchanges are extended at the end of this encounter when Logan leaves, and his place in the frame is immediately assumed, in silence and without motion, by Alma. It is as if the priest is seen as an alternative equally to Ruth's husband and Keller's wife.

The casting of Montgomery Clift is central to these effects. There is a potent anomaly in putting a Method actor of such intense inner turbulence into a role whose interior world is to remain hidden and whose motives the film will not expose. The Clift of 1952 also represents glamour—to my eye the most remarkable male object of the camera's rapture since the young Gary Cooper, one on whose features monochrome settles in bliss. Anne Baxter's beauty, though considerable, does not have the dazzle of Clift's, and the rest of the cast seems to have been chosen to offset his allure. Truffaut was very acute in pointing to the appeal of the figure's momentum, and the way Hitchcock's camera responds to its surging penetration of space³. Some credit for this should go to the costume designer, Orry-Kelly, for providing gowns that enhance the force and beauty of Clift's movement. But where Truffaut sees Logan's constant forward motion as an index of his integrity it is possible to respond to it differently, as an emblem of his elusiveness. The camera displays the unapproachability of this man who makes himself available to all. His private quarters are never seen, and we observe him in no conversation that he has sought for himself. The film offers us an experience of Logan as impossibly attractive and frustratingly distant, the two qualities being interdependent.

Keller's implication of Logan in his crime (by stowing the bloodstained cassock in Logan's trunk) has little practical purpose. It does not serve Keller's material interest that Logan should come under suspicion. But it does strengthen the bond between them and give Keller the prospect of drawing Logan into his experience of society's hostility and suspicion.

A scene that establishes this motivation comes early in the picture when Keller returns to the rectory from police questioning to find Father Logan up a step-ladder painting the walls of the library. He receives no satisfaction of his demand that the priest relax the prescribed mode of expiation—'I can't give myself up. You must tell me some other way.' Logan withholds contact by continuing to paint. Keller moves to force him to meet his gaze; he steps up onto the wrong side of the ladder to pull himself toward Logan's height and stares into his eyes. 'Aren't you human? Haven't you ever been afraid? You are so good.⁴ It's easy for you to be good. Have you no pity for me?' On this last question he reaches out his free hand to touch Logan's breast in a gesture unmistakable though obscured—one might think censored—by the paint tin in the foreground. Logan remains fixed and responds neither to the words nor to the gesture. Then Otto jumps away, startled, as an off-screen call announces the approach of his wife. Logan resumes his painting as if nothing has happened.

This scene seems, more clearly than any in *Strangers on a Train*, to show the villain either exploiting his crime or driven by it to seek physical contact with the hero. If I am not concerned to advance a 'gay reading' (of the scene or of the film) that is because it is unclear how our understanding improves if we think of either character as pursuing or repressing desires for sexual intimacy. It is beyond dispute that Keller seeks and Logan withholds emotional involvement and an acknowledgement of complicity. Keller and Ruth are alike in constantly approaching Logan but in managing to draw him to them only in his priestly role. They share in frustration at his eagerness to help and his indifference to touch.

It turns out that Keller can kill his wife ('my Alma') but not the priest. Finally it is his own death that he uses to bring Logan close. The point is strongly presented both acoustically and by the camera. Keller is caught as a tiny, distant figure in front of a proscenium, seen and heard from afar with a wide-angle lens stressing the depth of the space and the length of the ballroom floor that separates him from Logan and the detectives. This image is repeated ten times and cut against much closer shots of his pursuers—group shots and close-ups in shallower perspective that include five of Larue and five of Logan in which Clift is seen at his most glowingly photogenic, his face lovingly moulded by the light. Only when—in response to Logan's 'Don't make them do it, Keller'—the trapped man provokes a wounding gunshot by firing at the police, only then do we get a closer view. Immediately, the picture cuts back to the police group, then presents the distant perspective on Keller again as Logan enters the frame in the foreground to stride directly towards him. The shrinking of the distance between them is measured by travelling a close shot in front of Logan as he advances and intercutting it with deep-focus viewpoint shots that track in onto Keller. Logan's final approach—ending a pause that threatened to become a standoff—is caused by Keller's suicidal pretence of preparing to fire at him. The stalemate is broken as Keller is hit by a police bullet and Logan rushes forward to catch him in his arms.

The drama ends with Logan stilled in mournful contemplation of the corpse he holds, possibly—but how can we know?—turning in his mind the portrait that Keller has drawn of his friendless, isolated state. Perhaps he is weighing

his own role in the film's events. Perhaps, but if he is we cannot tell what kind of responsibility he assumes. Logan remains as perfectly masked at the end as he was at the beginning, when nothing suggested a man who had just come from a meeting, with Ruth, that had roused his fury and had landed him with an awkward assignment, confronting her blackmailer. The film fades to black on a lovely, unrevealing close-up with music subdued and inconclusive. This non-ending seems a recognition that the film cannot tell Logan's story, or that Logan does not have one.

We might expect 'The End' to come up over the dark screen but instead the music surges into a change of mood and we are returned to that same floating image of the defined and the cloudy with which we started. (It is not, this time, backed by the woman's song.)

To restate that image is to refer us back to the opening, to *DIRECTION* and the display of the distant figure of Alfred Hitchcock. One of the notable features of this personal appearance was that the author presented himself in profile. The peculiarities of the profile shot, most often in close-up, have been exploited by no-one more eloquently than by Hitchcock. It is the shot that allows inspection without creating contact or offering intimacy. At the start of *Alfred Hitchcock's "I Confess"* it allows him to display himself without revealing or, say, exposing himself. And of course he says nothing. Then what was the confession? One who parades in public may have to balance hope and terror over the way he will be seen and judged; the hope of the world's approval with the terror of the world's contempt. This is particularly the case for one who parades in front of a camera knowing that he cannot command the camera's awe in the manner of a movie star. 'Look at me!' is a dangerous cry for a man so aware of insecurity and of the mortal agony of public humiliation. Yet it is a cry issued in every one of Hitchcock's films.

In its movement through confession from the closed and contained to the open and exposed, the movie tries to work out the problem of the secret and the prices of silence. Against a range of declarations variously volunteered and extracted, it patterns the mute seclusion of Michael Logan who guards the secrets of others and remains unreadable in respect of his own. Relief from the terror of guilty knowledge may be imagined in two directions, by hiding everything perfectly—the silent route—or by complete self-exposure so that one has nothing to hide. But if the dread of being immured is equal to the horror of being unmasked, and if these emotions are always stronger than the enjoyment of solitude, or pleasure in community, you are caught in a suspense of which you will not reliably be the Master. If, as I believe, Hitchcock's ambition was to shape this film as his own confession he was making an avowal of his riven nature, his inability to find a point of rest between the desire for recognition and the terror of being known.

So he was one of us, after all.

3. *ibid*

4. One writer reports this as 'You're so cold' (Jane E. Sloan, *Alfred Hitchcock—The Definitive Filmography*, U.Cal. Press, 1995 p.246) O.E. Hasse's German inflections make it hard to distinguish, but it is an interesting possibility that would only strengthen the reading I offer.

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SAME TUNE AGAIN!

Repetition and Framing in
Letter from an Unknown Woman

by V.F. Perkins

Towards the end of *The Reckless Moment* (Max Ophuls, 1949), at a point when it seems the heroine's problems have been resolved, there is a scene in a bar. The camera foregrounds an attractive young woman, dissolute-looking and most likely drunk, as she leans across a juke-box to berate the mechanism: "No, no, no, no! Just play the same tune again. Same tune again!" This is in the course of a rapid movement tracing Martin Donnelly's (James Mason) agitated quest, so the woman is held in the frame only for a moment as he pauses. But the sound-track retains her words beyond the passing of her image. "Same tune again!" marks a stage where what seemed settled is about to be cast back into jeopardy, and Donnelly is about to be given a reason to renew his efforts to be of service to the heroine, along with the opportunity to resume their strange, unacknowledged courtship.

An equivalent moment in *Letter from an Unknown Woman* comes at the opera, with the repeated calls of "Second act. Curtain going up" just when Stefan is about to re-enter Lisa's life.¹ In each case the device marks the shape of the story, marks the story as being shaped and not just unwinding with the course of events or the process of memory. Both devices articulate a relationship between the pattern of the story and the pattern of the film. They do this, in part, through their stress on things not starting but starting again. They incorporate processes independent of the protagonists' aims and actions—the mechanism of the juke-box, the conventions of operatic performance—so as to invoke the routine quality of the world's repetitions and the possibility of being habituated or inured to its ways of going on going round.

These emphases are in permanent tension with another possibility, that of the decisive, the crucial, where every moment may be the one to be measured, and every step may



Lisa (Joan Fontaine).

count. Each of the characters experiences time differently because for each of them any given moment has its own, and their own, blend between the mundane and the special. Emblematic here is the film's use of the idea of the birthday as on the one hand an occasion that comes round year on year, advancing us stealthily from cradle to grave, and on the other as marking a beginning, or a new beginning. The film is at pains to specify whether a repetition is acknowledged or ignored or vaguely apprehended, and to discriminate between repetition lived as boredom or servitude or disappointment and repetition embraced or desired as renewal and affirmation.

Such shadings are not easy to achieve. They require both boldness and delicacy. As a ground the film builds a careful discrimination between its own processes and those in the lives and world of its characters, insisting on its own ability both to observe and to produce patterns of repetition and variation. Crucially the marked returns to Stefan at various stages in his reading of Lisa's letter pronounce the film's paragramming of her story by making a formal repetition out of what could be mere continuation, more of the same. Once the film has established its devices—Joan Fontaine's narrating voice as representing the words of Lisa's letter, the moves out of and into focus as transitions from the reading present to the recounted past—it uses them with freedom and refuses to be governed by any simple understanding that would dictate a strict system of equivalences. So the focus-blur that most often marks a move between past and present, and is most often bridged by a resumption of narration, can function also to make the ellipse that covers the birth of young Stefan without any return to the moment of reading.

The challenge to the film is to arrive at order and comprehensibility without falling into an impoverishing neatness. It is vital to its effect that it should not solicit a literal reading of its devices, and that it should arrive at a persuasive form while blocking any coherent understanding of the relations between the words of the letter, the speaking voice and the movie's images. No rational time-scale or system of subjectivities holds the key elements in harmony. Lisa cannot be reading the letter since Lisa is dead. Stefan cannot be imagining the reading in Lisa's voice since he does not know who sent it. The images we see are not explicable as projections of the letter's content since we are so often shown events and transactions of which Lisa was unaware. Of course a loose convention is in play, one that allows us to understand the voice-over as speaking (some of) the words of the letter, and the images as constituting an internal movie that offers an independent version of the letter's events. But Ophüls and Koch push very hard against the limits of this convention and expose—where others would seek to naturalise—its artifice.

A relevant contrast is with *Brief Encounter* (David Lean/Noël Coward, 1945) and it would be interesting to know how consciously it was a model for Ophüls and Koch. One could imagine Ophüls, a director generous to the work of fellow artists, as an admirer of the British film and one impressed—as so many were—by its restraint and its refusal of glamour and gloss. Equally it would be unsurprising to find that his artistic conscience was affronted by the Lean film's mixture of schematism and inconsistency in, for instance, its opportunistic use of Rachmaninov's music. In

Brief Encounter the flashback story is narrated by a voice representing the unspoken thoughts of the Celia Johnson character (Laura). The film stays carefully within the constraints of its narrative premise until near its end but then makes one very large deviation (in the scene that Billy Wilder claims as the inspiration for *The Apartment*). Laura scurries away down the fire escape when an assignation with her passionate friend Alec (Trevor Howard) is interrupted by the surprise return of the apartment's owner. We are then given a scene between the two men—the dialogue that famously climaxes in “No, Alec—not angry—just disappointed”. The scene defies the logic of the flashbacks as Laura's memories (which may be her fantasies). When it is finished we rejoin Laura; her voice-over resumes to tell us that she spent the next three hours wandering alone to overcome her humiliation and shame.² Nothing has given her access to the men's exchange, and nothing legitimises their scene as, say, a product of Laura's imagination.

Brief Encounter's mapping of viewpoint is insistently tidy, with concealments at the start that have no other value than to prepare the ground for clarifications at the end. The governing contrivance jars against the film's unwillingness or inability to sustain its narrative premise. Neatness without formal rigour reduces to fussiness. Whether or not in reaction to *Brief Encounter* Ophüls' strategy is just the reverse. Where Lean's Laura is silent about the men's conversation, and the film is seemingly embarrassed by the break in its narrative logic, *Letter from an Unknown Woman* frequently and systematically displays the mismatch between conflicting narrative assumptions, most particularly by stressing Lisa's absence from, or obliviousness to, scenes and incidents pictured in the flashbacks.

Much comment has for good reason centred on those elements that undercut her enraptured view of the romance. Representative here are Stefan's negotiations with the old couple who run the scenic train in the Prater. Both times attention is drawn to Stefan's leaving Lisa in the compartment and so leaving Lisa in ignorance of his transaction. There is in each case a cut to the exterior of the closed compartment, a cut emphatic in its refusal of the fluid continuity that was at Ophüls' command. Then the camera tracks and pans with Stefan so as to measure the length of his walk from the compartment to the ticket kiosk when he goes to ‘talk to the engineer’. Finally, in each instance, after Stefan's return towards the compartment the camera stays with the mechanics to detail the labour of illusion-making in a process from which Stefan too is excluded.

This scene stays within the relatively easy convention whereby the film, being bound to show more than a narrator can describe, is also free to show us more of the world than the narrator could have observed, and to point to the signif-

1. There's also, more elliptically, “We'll revisit the scenes of our youth”.
2. In the course of this sequence there occurs an image which does seem to be taken up by Ophüls in the parallel passage after the married Lisa's flight from Stefan's apartment. An overhead shot that sees Laura walking to a park bench beneath the statuary of a war memorial finds an echo (minus some grotesquely phallic elements) in Ophüls' high-angle on Lisa as she walks across a deserted square beneath a fountain. The prominence of railway scenes in *Letter from an Unknown Woman* might also be thought to owe something to Lean's film. The shooting script envisaged a scene in that crucial *Brief Encounter* setting, the station buffet, when Lisa has seen her son onto the train but has not yet made the move to set out in search of Stefan (Wexman and Hollinger, ed., *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, Max Ophüls, director, Rutgers U.P., 1986, p 148.)



Louis Jordan and Joan Fontaine—farewell at the train station.

icance of aspects ignored by the protagonists. The film's emphases can be more or less striking in their divergence from those of the narrator—variables that Ophuls keeps under finely nuanced control. The convention is stretched to its limits perhaps in those moments where within the flashbacks we are given sights which could have fallen within Lisa's consciousness and which, if they had done so, would have required her to make a response. The starkest instance of this comes when the married Lisa, Frau Stauffer, is standing at the gates of Stefan's apartment. In an abrupt break from the continuity that has carried us smoothly to a close shot of Lisa from within the gates, the film cuts to a long view of her from the far end of the street, and a rapid pan reveals Johann Stauffer (Maurice Journet) at the window of his carriage observing the action which is, for him, definitive of Lisa's infidelity. If the continuity has shown Lisa to be revisiting the scenes of her youth, through a process of sound and image that recalls earlier passages, the break in the flow is equally emphatic that a married woman in this society incurs radically changed consequences for herself and her beloved when she attempts to renew the romantic pursuits of an unattached young woman. Here, in a shot which is all about seeing, being seen, and their opposites, it is vivid that Lisa is unaware of her husband's presence.

It is in those devices that bear on the relationship between the letter and the flashbacks that Ophuls and Koch are boldest in their defiance of narrative logic. The design is, I take it, to ensure that we cannot come to feel that there is a real

world within the fiction where Lisa's writing of the letter can merge with Stefan's reading. Their coming together occurs only in and through the artifice of the film. Beyond that we are blocked from giving them the responsibility for the information and viewpoints that the film presents. Fictionality extends from the story to the narrative method with the film's flaunting of impossibility, at its most overt in the scene that depicts Lisa's life once she has left Linz to make her own way in Vienna, and to seek reunion with Stefan. As soon as we are taken into the dress shop to find Lisa modelling garments for Madame Spitzer (Sonja Bryden) Ophuls embarks on a swift delineation of its various spaces, levels and barriers, emphasising the separation between areas in terms of function and protocol as well as of space and structure. With smoothness and economy he establishes a stage for Lisa's display in relation to a range of back-stages and off-stages. Action and camera movement then show the quest for privacy as an old lecher in an officer's uniform crosses the room away from his wife to engage in a sly consultation with Mme Spitzer, who is seated at her desk on the other side of a railing at a level below Lisa's stage. More could hardly be done to stress that theirs is an intimate and furtive conversation as the officer, with his back turned from Lisa, hears the disappointing news that "she is not like that... Every evening as soon as the shutters are closed, off she goes—straight home."

The next words are Lisa's, delivered in the narration: "Madame Spitzer spoke the truth. I was not like the others..." The lines are written to disturb our understanding. Lisa seems

to have heard the words that were so conspicuously withheld from her. But if she could not have heard them then, where is she that she can comment on them now? Boldness is balanced with delicacy in the achievement of this impossible continuity. No words intervene between Mme Spitzer's and Lisa's, but their lines are spaced by a dissolve through time and a move from inside to out. A new action has begun with the women's departure from work into the snow-strewn evening streets before we hear Lisa's comment. Through his pacing Ophuls ensures that the effect is not to explode the narrative into absurdity with a gag, but subtly to position it beyond any real time and space.

We should ask ourselves what is performed by Joan Fontaine in her delivery of the narration. She is not enacting the composition of the letter; she does not pause or correct herself in the effort to find the right words. Although she suggests at the start that she may be dying her voice is not fevered or enfeebled. The film does without one of Stefan Zweig's key literary effects, the adoption of a stilted manner that displays the woman's straining after the weight and depth that she wants her words to attain. In Zweig's tale the letter opens with a blunt statement of the death of the writer's child. Then the fact of it is obsessively restated so that the whole account is governed by one mood of heartbreak at the edge of hysteria. But in the film both the narration and the performance vary their tone in response to the events immediately under description. The moods of the words and of the voice carry the sense that Lisa is speaking to Stefan, reliving the feelings and thoughts of the moments as she retraces them. The fiction is almost of Lisa's seeing the past now as Stefan reads about it, and offering her response to its sights and statements—responding now, for instance, to Mme Spitzer's description. So the impression of presence, of an impossible presence, is reinforced.

The effect is reversed in Stefan's reading of the letter. At its completion his mute servant John (Art Smith) does him the service of writing down the name of Lisa Berndt. He responds to this as if to new information. Yet the name has been extensively used throughout the flashbacks. It could hardly be otherwise, one might think.³ But here too *Letter from an Unknown Woman* aggravates a difficulty that other films would avoid. The first word spoken within the first flashback is Lisa's name. It is not spoken but shouted, three times, as Lisa's mother summons her indoors from her dreamy contemplation of the delivery van with Stefan's 'beautiful things'. Thereafter the name is frequently used, often with peremptory emphasis to command Lisa's movement, notably right at the start of three of the four major flashback sequences; in close juxtaposition, then, with Stefan's reading image.⁴ It should at least trouble us to find Stefan at the end still without the knowledge of Lisa's name that we seem to have obtained through his reading.

We could understand the intention coherently as a design to maintain the subjectivity of the narrative in the letter's text (where Lisa is only—like the heroine in *Rebecca*—a nameless "I") and to stress the independence of the much broader perspective taken in the film's enactments: the film knows her name, though the letter does not tell it. Yet we must understand the drama of the flashbacks to be closely derived from the letter's account; its shape is determined by Lisa's experience and we see nothing of Stefan's past life or

career (for instance in Milan or America or in the concert hall) that does not immediately bear upon Lisa's story as Lisa has told it.

It is, on the face of it, odder that the letter is unaddressed than that it is unsigned. Lisa was never going to reach the end of what she had to tell because she was never going, in the circumstances of her writing, to arrive at the one point that could satisfy her: Stefan's recognition. So her writing would stop only as her strength failed, at the start of yet another "If only..."

At the opening there is no Dear Stefan to specify the you in "By the time you read this letter I may be dead." There is a play with the names here whereby the writer has omitted Stefan's name and withheld her own, only for the film to have it shouted by her mother on the break as narration yields to enactment in the flashback that takes us to Lisa's girlhood. On this day—which she speaks of as her birthday—Lisa's mother names her for us, performing the introduction that Lisa consistently evades. One aspect of the deadlock between Lisa and Stefan, reflecting their different orientations to time and memory and hope, is that Lisa is unwilling to sully the authenticity and spontaneity of Stefan's recognition by identifying herself while Stefan in his narcissism wants to hear his own name on Lisa's lips more than he wants to learn hers.

His "Who are you?" outside the opera is hardly a request for her name. It is quite probable that he knows her as Stauffer's wife. What would be involved in his remembering her name is a world away from what it would mean to be told it.

Stefan would at last be preferring knowledge to mystery. His "Who are you?" is not only "Where have I seen you before?" but "Why does it matter?" He is asking Lisa to tell him her role in his life—a question which it will take Lisa the whole of her letter to define and which Lisa can present only from Lisa's point of view. Stefan's "Who are you?" believes that the answer on this woman's significance for him must come from outside himself. It requires notions of perfection and romantic destiny—"that one face among all others"—at least as powerful as those that govern Lisa. (And it requires unattainability, which means that Lisa's presenting herself as a married woman available for seduction can only make her one of the "usual things".)

If Lisa neither addresses nor signs her letter, these functions are performed for her—both of them—by John. In their essays on *Letter from an Unknown Woman* Stanley Cavell and George M. Wilson have drawn attention to his role as signatory, seeing it as Ophuls' acknowledgement of authorship.⁵ But John's role in recalling Lisa's name—effectively, for Stefan, giving her a name—continues his role as the bearer of her letter (which can also be seen as his delivery of the screenplay). When Stefan arrives home at the start of the film he is intending to make a quick departure from Vienna to avoid a duel. He has given his orders and is walking away, almost out of shot, when John summons him back into the

3. Wrongly, but understandably—since it is so easy to underestimate the inventiveness of filmmakers.

4. It is not used in the same way at the start of the final flashback. By then, Lisa has become Frau Stauffer; she has that name because "you know who my husband is".

5. Stanley Cavell, *Contesting Tears*, University of Chicago Press, 1996 p109; George M Wilson, *Narration in Light*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986, p125.

corridor with a touch (as if to remind him of something he has forgotten) and goes to fetch a silver salver on which the letter sits unopened. Making the delivery of the letter an interruption in Stefan's movement and a reversal of its direction anticipates the pattern of his encounters with Lisa. The action of fetching and offering the letter is elaborated to stress John's role as intermediary. This elaboration stands in contrast with the absence of attention to the writing on the envelope, and is a stylistic decision in line with the definition of the letter as an object that sits unattended in the hallway, waiting for Stefan. It is placed near the centre of the frame and given quite a glow by Franz Planer's lighting. Among the rejected options were to have the letter delivered after Stefan's return, to have it offered to him as one of several (Zweig's way), or to have him find it on his desk without John's aid.

The transmission of the letter allows for a strengthening of John's part in the palindromic patterns of the film's start and finish. Palindrome is a special case of repetition and variation where the elements of the first part are repeated in reverse order in the second so that the approach to the end is also a return to the start. The clear reversal of the opening image in the closing one, as the departing carriages mirror Stefan's arrival, articulates the framing of Lisa's story by Stefan's. Matched sets of gestures, immediately before and straight after Stefan's reading of the letter, help to mark the palindromic pattern because the gestures are more striking and less in the flow of the action than, say, John's holding the door

open for Stefan at the start and closing it on him at the end. I refer to the gestures in which Stefan attends to his eyes. Having thrown the letter onto his desk, Stefan pinches the corners of his eyes in a gesture of tiredness; he then walks to the bathroom, removing the letter from its packet, and sluices his eyes with water at the washstand. At that moment his attention is caught by the letter's first statement. A close-up of the writing is answered by a close-up of Stefan, his face wet with beads of water. He picks up the letter and takes a towel to dab at the drops as he goes to begin his reading.

At the close of the final flashback, Stefan completes his reading on Lisa's last "If only...", and we move from the letter's end page to a close shot of Stefan, tracking in to glimpse the tears in his eyes. Then in the wake of the fragmentary, misted images that suggest his effort to grasp a memory of Lisa—scenes from the past that haunt but that cannot be held—we see in close-up the gesture that Stanley Cavell takes as the starting-point for his discussion: "his response... is to cover his eyes with the outspread fingers of both hands in a melodramatic gesture of horror and exhaustion."⁶

My suggestion is that both the tears and the blocking of the eyes have been anticipated palindromically in the imagery of the opening.

I want to avoid imposing on the film a more precise patterning than that offered by Ophüls. An inventory of sights and sounds in the opening and closing sequences would yield more unmatched than matched elements. (Strict palindrome could only be absurd in a fiction movie.) But there is

Lisa as first seen by Stefan.



a sufficiently pronounced matching in the content and order of some major moments to give a suggestion of palindrome. The effect is to lend weight to the containment of Lisa's story within Stefan's, and so to balance our sense of Lisa's letter as the frame within which the events of the past are accessed. Viewpoint is important in Stefan's reading as well as in Lisa's writing. (If we share Stefan's reading, learning about the past at the same time as he does and within similar limits, our involvement is of a different order since only Stefan is reading, perhaps seeing, himself within Lisa's account and is experiencing its impact both as a revision of his life-story and as a challenge to his memory.)

A major distinction between Stefan's story and Lisa's—against Lisa's desire to insist that the two stories are one—is that Stefan's story is ongoing and unresolved whereas Lisa's is at an end. Hence the emphasis on the delivery of Lisa's letter as a sealed packet of a certain bulk and weight. It is from another place. It is the past; there is no more to come. So Stefan's reading is of a narrative already concluded. There was an evident opportunity, refused by the film, to develop the symmetry in the framing of Lisa's tale. When Stefan started to read, and the voice of Joan Fontaine repeated the opening sentences, we could have been taken to Lisa as she began to write the letter in the hospital, adding another layer to the flashback sequence. That would have naturalised the use of the voice (which many filmmakers would have thought useful) at the cost of bringing the moment of Lisa's narrative into a present and uniting it with the moment of Stefan's reading. The film's 'irrational' procedure prevents these moments from merging and allows them to approach one another only in the letter's end at Lisa's death, imaged in the black blot that halted her script. The new discovery here, revising the sense of the sealed packet, is that the letter's story is not complete. It is instead no more than over, because the reading is finished though the writing could not be.

There is a significant advantage in the refusal to balance the flashback structure, showing us the end of the writing but not its beginning: the film can present Lisa's life in strict chronology, taking her by stages from her "second birthday" to her maturity and death. That makes it less difficult for Joan Fontaine to convince us as the schoolgirl Lisa of the early sequences.⁷ The corresponding problem for Louis Jourdan is eased by delaying his appearance in each of the flashback sections so that he is not immediately juxtaposed with his reading image. Still, the alternation is eloquent: we see various stages of Stefan's life in relation to the recurrent framing image of the middle-aged roué. The alternation in Stefan's image, as against the steady development of Lisa's, gives formal expression to the dissonance between their stories and their attitudes.

Whereas the structure of the flashbacks would tend to depict Stefan's life as a series of incidents in Lisa's, the framing scenes insist on his having immediate and urgent predicaments of his own. To observe symmetries here as elsewhere is not to resolve the question of their function and effect, since patterning can serve both to create or reinforce order and to give the emphasis of contrast to the unmatched aspects.

The opening shot instructs us on the relationship between the stylistic patterns created by the film and the events portrayed within its world. In "Vienna About 1900" the horse-

drawn carriage is driven towards the camera through the rain of a gaslit street. The shot displays the precision of its framing, since it turns out that the camera, panning to hold the vehicle in view, is in place to approach the side window as it comes to a halt, neatly encompassing a centred view of the occupants and of Stefan's head when he dismounts, within the further frame of the farside window. The convergence of the camera's view with the carriage's point of arrest holds the movements of the fictional Vienna within an elegantly ordered continuity. Not everything, though, fits within its pattern. The film is telling a story that it knows. It is not telling a story about automata. As the carriage approaches from the distance, a running figure enters the frame from the left foreground, a man with an umbrella hurrying away down the street to avoid the rain. The direction of his movement counters the flow of the shot to sketch a world that proceeds in indifference to the motions and concerns of this telling. He is placed at the start of the film as an emblem of the ordinary. The figure prepares an immediate contrast with Stefan whose bearing is of one who does not greatly care whether he lives or dies; he stands shamefaced in the rain, avoiding the gaze of his companions⁸ but doing nothing to propel their conversation to a close while the water streams from the brim of his top hat as if from a gutter.

At the end the rain has cleared so that although the street is still wet with puddles the scene looks and sounds quite different. The elements of style do not determine for us, though, how we shall balance the significance of the completion of the film's opening image against that of change in key aspects of tone: the disappearance of the rain, the replacement of darkness by dawning light. Louis Jourdan's bearing is eloquent that Stefan faces death in better spirit than he faced running off and living on. But how far his vision has cleared and how far he has been drawn into a delusion—a "romantic nonsense" that colludes with the morbid rituals of the duel—these are questions that the film is concerned not to resolve.

Ophuls unites precision of form with openness to possibility rather than making it serve the definition of a thesis. His precision shows in the preparation of the material that will be the subject of repetition, variation or inversion in the film's development. The boldness of presence and the strength of shape given to the repeated features determines whereabouts the later references fall on a scale between faint allusion and bold statement. In a film so concerned with the significance of memory it is appropriate that the eloquence of its effects should depend on its capacity to stir our recall, with varying degrees of definition, of moments and patterns that we have seen before. One danger—that *Brief Encounter* seems

6. Cavell, 1996, p81

7. Ophuls' brilliance of craft shows in the way he gives us our first sight of Lisa, dwarfing the actress's height by framing her face at the bottom of the window through which she gazes into the removals van.

8. And attempting to manage a cigarette. This opening shot establishes smoking as a motif. Throughout the dialogue the foreground of the image is dominated by the white-gloved hand in which the one of Stefan's friends nearest the camera holds a cigarette. Thereafter few of the men of the film are without something to smoke in their hands or in their mouths. (John the manservant and Lisa's young Lieutenant in Linz are the notable exceptions.) Cigarettes recur through the film as emblems of enslavement and unfulfilled appetite. At the start Stefan is a chain smoker. By the end he seems to have found something to displace the habit. It is possible that the smoking motif was Ophuls's way of implicating himself with the men of the film and specially with Stefan. To judge from photographs Ophuls was quite a smoker and according to a number of reports he was quite a womaniser.

to me not to avoid—is that the material being set up for repetition will be inert on its first presentation.

These are the considerations that I want to hold in mind in revisiting a pair of shots that has already received extensive discussion—the matched camera movements over the staircase as first the adolescent Lisa watches Stefan's return from a night on the town in the company of a giggling mistress and then, years later, as he is seen to lead Lisa herself up the same stairs. Much comment has dwelt, appropriately, on the removal of Lisa's watching presence. The sense is that she has entered as a dream something which on her earlier witnessing of it had more the force of a nightmare, and that she is oblivious to the particular aspects of repetition that are so strongly presented to us.

Strength in the repetition partly depends on the boldness with which the image is shaped in its first instance. Since very many of the film's images involve the staircase, the structure that is to be particularly invoked in repetition needs to be highly distinctive. Its extremities are marked at the left by the gaslit globes of the hallway chandelier—an unusual sight because we are looking down into the jets of flame—and at the right by the expanse of bare wall that shields Lisa. The lines of the composition take added force from the curved patterns of metalwork and shadow constructed from the steel banisters. The extraordinary nature of the camera movement is determined by the effort to encompass the action on the staircase while keeping Lisa continuously in frame in the foreground, and showing her attempts to go on seeing without being seen. That produces the twisting camera movement, pivoted over Lisa's head at the right as she shrinks back against the wall of the stairwell. It also produces a pattern of repeated appearance and disappearance in the figures on the staircase. We see them enter from the vestibule; they go out of sight as they approach the stairs. They re-emerge as they reach the top and pause near the landing, only to disappear again behind the wall that masks the approach to Stefan's door. Their invisibility is stressed by the sound of furtive giggles and whispers at the bottom of the stairs and at the top by renewed giggling and the rattle as Stefan fumbles with his door-key.

The main features of this image, including the pattern of appearance and disappearance at the bottom of the stairs, are duplicated in the second instance. The repetition is pronounced because the cut to the overhead view is much more shocking as it has become a cut from exterior to interior, from a close view to a distant one, and because it is no longer in continuity with Lisa's waiting and watching by the landing. The position and movement of the camera lack the motivation that justified their contortions in the earlier instance since there is no longer a foreground figure to be held in frame. The crane out over the stairwell has become more vertiginous now that it is not shadowing the viewpoint of a human observer.

The visual repetition is cued by repetition on the sound track. The closing of the outer gates and of the hall door are sounds bracketing the familiar exchange that begins with 'Who is it?' from the concierge (Otto Waldis). After these reminders, however, the pattern of sound is crucial to a radical change of tone and the sense of difference between this occasion and the one that its images repeat. When Lisa and Stefan go out of view at the bottom of the stairs the empti-

ness of the image is matched by their silence; their soft, slow footfall is quite unlike the frivolous clatter and chatter we heard before. Then the suggestion was of tipsiness, and of an awareness of behaving disreputably. Those tones were amplified by the styleless flounces and frills of the woman's white gown and headdress and by the way that Stefan, in searching for his key, was encumbered by his evening dress, awkward in his management of a bulky cloak, his top hat and gloves. At the top of the stairs the haste in his leading of the woman, almost pulling her and hardly giving her a glance, together with his fumbling to remove his hat as they approach his door, carried the feeling (within the terms available in 1947) of his eagerness to get out of his clothes. Everything had a clumsy physicality. Since the event had a context for us only in Lisa's life, and none in the lives of Stefan or his woman, we saw his partner distantly as a nameless stranger—truly an unknown woman. She had the identity only of a floozie.

That has all changed in the repeated shot. It comes as the culmination not of Lisa's watching and waiting but of her, shall we say, courtship of Stefan. All that was sordid has become sacramental. There is no rush. The movements have a solemn, considerate grace. Lisa's hesitation at the top of the stairs is grave rather than coy, a moment of commitment with no demand to be coaxed. Her dress and hat are in undecorated black with a chaste simplicity of line. Stefan's clothing too has been softened and simplified so that clumsy urgency may be the more visibly replaced by attentiveness.

And noise has given way to music. The Ziehrer waltz played by the bandwomen and then by Stefan in the Prater ballroom ("Wiener Mad'ln") has been sustained on the sound track to become the fragrantly romantic accompaniment to this ascent. The calm and quiet of the sequence from ballroom and carriage to staircase stand in place of any moment of invitation or persuasion. We know that the return with Stefan is a matter of unspoken agreement, of desires mutually acknowledged from the outset.

So the assertion of similarity is put in tension with the sense of transformation. We know that Lisa longs to give herself to Stefan. We do not know how fully she recognises the role of appetite and the body in this sacrament, or whether she recognises anything that unites her with Stefan's, and the film's, other women. "I wanted," she will later write, "to be one woman... who asked you for nothing." The purposes of her ascent would, then, from her own viewpoint be utterly unlike those involved in Stefan's routines of pleasure. Here it becomes relevant to consider the culminations of the staircase shots and their sharp differences.

When Stefan and his woman disappeared from view for the second time they did so behind a flat, blank expanse of whitewashed wall at screen right that censored their activity. The shot was held while sound filled the blankness with suggestions of the flighty and illicit. Lisa was fixed near the centre of the frame but we could not see what, apart from her exclusion, the sounds meant to her. At the start we could see that she was watching; at the end we could not tell if she was listening.

In the reprise the pattern of appearance and disappearance is repeated, but the shot changes as soon as Stefan and Lisa go out of sight for the second time. We cut to the inside of Stefan's apartment for the couple's entrance and Lisa's immediate surrender to Stefan's embrace. There is a direct sense in





Lisa searches for Stefan in a cafe they once frequented.

which this action fills in the earlier blankness, so it is doubly striking that it yields straightaway to blankness reasserted. The conventional kiss fade-out is followed at the fade-in by an image of remarkable emptiness, reinforced by the disappearance of music. It turns out that we are looking at closed draperies sealing off an area of the dress-shop, but indecipherable silence is what we first encounter.

In the pattern of repetition and variation the emptiness here replaces the extended diminuendo in which the disillusioned Lisa had made her lonely way back down the stairs, the camera holding its position until she had exited at the bottom of the frame: "And so there was nothing left for me. I went to Linz." That was the point at which music came in, as an expression of anguished disappointment. When this shot is repeated it comes again in strikingly abbreviated form. It cuts off at the point where, earlier, it had developed as a sorrowing reflection on Stefan's infidelity. We may see frustration replaced by fulfilment. But it is an equal part of the pattern that an extended assessment of events is replaced by silence.

Staircase One⁹ was embedded in one of the letter's most extended, almost garrulous passages of commentary in which

the words spoken by Lisa became something close to an interior monologue accompanying her exploration of the now empty rooms of the home she had had to leave. It was part of a lengthy passage in which the only significant, dramatically salient, words were those of the commentary that culminated in the first return to the present and Stefan's reading image on "You who have always lived so freely..." The shot's vital context, then, included its context in Lisa's reflections.

Such a context is entirely absent from Staircase Two. In the sequences depicting the love affair the commentary tails off at the moment when Stefan is at last about to notice Lisa

9. I am adopting 'Staircase One' and 'Staircase Two' to identify the first and second of the repeated pair because it would be a distorting inaccuracy to describe them as the first and second of the staircase shots. It is a vital fact that Staircase One is already the repetition of a familiar setting.

10. For the record, their song is 'Nur für Natur' from the operetta *Der lustige Krieg* (The Merry War) by Johann Strauss II—worth specifying in order to correct a misunderstanding propounded by Virginia Wright Wexman and taken up by Susan M. White in her book *The Cinema of Max Ophüls* (Columbia U.P., 1995), that the film 'contains not a single word of German'. Both writers give a lot of weight to this strange assertion. The film presents a riotous patchwork of languages and accents, and it incorporates plenty of German words. There may be food for thought in the choice of a German word for fire—'brand'—as the surname for Lisa's Stefan.

waiting in the snow outside the apartment building. It yields to the music of the street singers here,¹⁰ and it does not return until Stefan's departure for Milan and the letter's thoughts about his promise to return in two weeks: "How little you knew yourself. That train was taking you out of my life." It is as if Lisa is overflowing with words to express disappointment and regret. She can never come to the end of "If only..." But she has nothing to say about fulfilment.¹¹ We may choose to understand her speechlessness as an expression of the sense that rapture is beyond words. But it is one of the functions of the pattern of repetition and reversal to open up other ways of responding.

Lisa's silence goes with the absence of her witnessing foreground presence. It is a silence about her place in the stream of Stefan's lovers as well as about the consummation of her passion. We may relate it to her presentation of her first disillusionment. What had Lisa learned from the sight of Stefan's mistress to persuade her that there was "nothing left for me"? She already knew that many of his friends—most of them—were women. Staircase One already condensed some significant repetitions, of the staircase itself as the central emblem of the routines of Stefan's life, of Lisa's overhead view of adult sexuality (when she emerged at the top of the stairs to surprise her mother in embrace with Herr Kastner) and of Lisa's spying from above on Stefan's nocturnal activity. This last was in continuity with the instances of the illicit (stealing, hiding) in Lisa's appropriation of Stefan's music into her fantasies when "though [because?] you didn't know it, you were giving me some of the happiest hours of my life." Happiness in fantasy prepares the misery of disillusion not because Lisa finds out that Stefan is a sexual being, but because his timing is catastrophic for her. The perfection of Lisa's romantic fantasy required Stefan to be ready for her at precisely the moment when she was ready for him, ready "to throw myself at your feet, and cling to you and never leave you." For Lisa, as for Stefan, the pursuit of perfection means a life defined by disappointment.

What is it that encourages me to talk of the absence of commentary on the scenes of romantic fulfilment as Lisa's silence? We have to understand that the events of the past, insofar as Stefan is told of them, are recounted in the text of the letter. "Night after night I returned to the same spot, but you never noticed me until one evening..." This must be a sentence that continues in the letter, whose continuation the film has replaced with images. Sensibly, then, Lisa is not silent about the events of Staircase Two—only unheard. But here I want to return to my start. Ophuls and Koch devised a form that baffles the attempt at a sensible reading. My argument is that the intention, and certainly the effect, was to create an unstable set of frames so that while a story is told, with events whose occurrence is not to be doubted, the definition of their significance is never pursued at the cost of suggestion. The film's lucidity is a lucidity in presenting ranges of possibility, through what it can omit to specify as well as through what it can show.

The refusal to confine flashback and voice-over within a coherent convention gave the film access to the metaphorical possibilities of these devices, allowing the passages of speech and silence, explicitness and reticence, to register expressively. At the same time there was a partial submission to limitations of viewpoint that seemed to assign Lisa a role

in determining what was to be seen of her life and of Stefan's, so that opportunities were created for veiling motivations and for leaving thoughts, feelings and attitudes open to speculation. For instance when Stefan comes to the photographs that Lisa has enclosed to stand as his son's biography, it is clear that he is moved by these glimpses of a child he will never meet; his use of a magnifying glass speaks of a hunger for knowledge that the snapshots cannot satisfy. But nothing tells us how far Stefan attends to Lisa's presence in one of these images. And when Lisa tells of her marriage and says that Stefan knows who her husband is, we are without guidance about the extent of Stefan's appreciation that this letter is from that woman whose husband has challenged him to a duel—the woman who, we shall shortly discover, came calling a few days ago after an encounter at the Opera.

The masking of Stefan within Lisa's viewpoints is particularly powerful in Staircase Two, for Stefan's attitude here is perhaps the most crucial issue in our sense of what is being repeated and what has been transformed. We are shown that Lisa could be seen as just one in the succession of Stefan's women. We are not told whether Stefan sees her in that way. As a result we are given no hint about what Stefan's response might have been if Lisa had been able to seek him out with the news of her pregnancy after his return from Milan.

Stefan's leaving is able to be read by Lisa as a confirmation of her prophecy (in the Prater ballroom, when Stefan had asked for her promise) "I won't be the one to vanish." This terrible form of words predicted betrayal while recognising itself only as a loving vow of fidelity. Unacknowledged in the letter, but confirmed by what we see as clearly as the repetition in Staircase Two, is that Lisa is each time the one who vanishes—to Linz, into the charity hospital, and away in flight from the final sad encounter. Stefan's reaction to the last disappearance is withheld from us, and is something to which Lisa gives no apparent thought, but it is an issue brought to mind by the reaction that we do see—the servant John's witnessing her departure as she crosses him on the stairs.

The patterns of revelation and masking enabled by the film's structure allow Lisa to speak as if her actions and inactions are perfectly explained by her love for Stefan and his son. Other possibilities are built into the picture's fabric but not enforced, for instance an element of revenge in Lisa's presentation of the photographs of young Stefan and her reflections on the happiness he brought her. It becomes a possibility too, but not a dogmatic assertion, that Lisa's Ideal was by her definition a man who would disappoint her, and that Stefan's Ideal was by his definition a woman he would never find. Ophuls and Koch discovered a form that avoided sentimentality while negotiating the danger of a merely cynical denial of romance—one that would only have sneered at yearnings for love and transcendence. The film's unique blending of strength of pattern with openness results in our being shown the failures of Lisa's vision and of Stefan's without being made complacent about the perfection our own.

11. Of course it would have been a formidable task to find something for her to say that would not have caused an explosion at the Breen Office, but Ophuls and Koch were equal to formidable tasks.

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CAT PEOPLE

and its "two worlds"

by Jason Wilcox

In this essay I want to look at the film *Cat People* (1942), both produced (by Val Lewton: born Yalta 1904, emigrated 1909) and directed (by Jacques Tourneur: born Paris 1904, emigrated 1913, returned to Paris 1929-34) by emigrés to the U.S. In addition, it is largely concerned with the difficulties of a foreign female (played by Simone Simon, whose film career began in France in 1931, but who moved to America in 1935) living in a New York in which she wants to belong, but cannot.

In order to elucidate the film, I am drawing on a new theory of cultural origins developed by the anthropologist Chris Knight in his book *Blood Relations*. Here he argues that all the world's magical myths and fairy-tales share a common structure. This structure derives from the social structure of an African hunter-gatherer moiety society, in which culture emerged (approximately 100,000 years ago) as a consequence of females coercing males to hunt for them by going on a sex-strike at dark moon. At this time, by pretending to be infertile (menstruating) male animals they were collectively signalling "no" ("wrong sex, wrong species, wrong time") as well as indicating to the hunters what they were wanting: bleeding (raw) animal meat brought to them. This shared fantasy creates the first human rules and agreements, especially the domain of the sacred/taboo, which is contrasted with the profane/everyday. To enable the sacred to emerge, females enact together a shared fantasy, creating—through song, dance and body paint (the first cosmetics)—a collective identity which is paradoxical, or beyond easy definition. By connecting their sacredness to the hunted animal, they prevent the hunters from eating the killed animal on the spot (the "hunter's own kill rule"). Instead, the hunters return (at full moon, the most propitious time for the climax of the hunt, when there is the maximum amount of continuous light) to the "home-base" with their kills, where the women emerge from their ritual "other world" and turn back to themselves again. The blood (and the body paint) is removed, the meat is cooked, there is feasting and the "marital" or heterosexual sex-strike is lifted.

According to this theory, metamorphosis, transformation or "skin-change" is a specifically female capacity, associated with marital disjunction. The female can, as it were, move between two worlds. In one of these worlds (the "sacred") is her blood kin or sisters, in the other (the "profane") her husband. She belongs fully to neither, since it is the fact of *alternation* which is crucial. In the earliest hunter-gatherer societies these two worlds are complementary; in later, agricultural and post-agricultural societies they tend to become mutually exclusive. Movement may be possible, but it may be irreversible and is in any case never unproblematic.

To see how this might relate to *Cat People*, let's consider its plot: Irena, a Serbian-born commercial artist living in New York, is haunted by the fear that she is descended from a race of cat-women who, when physically aroused, turn into panthers. Oliver falls in love with her and tries to convince her that her fears are groundless. They marry but Irena is afraid to consummate her marriage, begging Oliver to be patient. After a time, Oliver persuades her to visit Dr. Judd, a psychiatrist. Judd proves to be no help. Irena grows worse, and Oliver finds solace in telling his problems to Alice, who works at his ship-designing firm. Subsequently, Alice is twice menaced by some unknown animal. Oliver tells Irena he is going to divorce her, and later that evening both he and Alice are attacked while working late at the office. Dr. Judd visits Irena and tries to make love to her. She turns into a panther and kills him. Wounded by Judd, Irena dies at Central Park Zoo while trying to free a caged panther.

The central figure of this drama is the woman, Irena. It is upon her that the plot hinges. The "inciting incident" (the phrase comes from Robert McKee's study of screenwriting, *Story*) is her courtship by Oliver, which she consciously welcomes, but at a deeper level fears. This "upsets the balance of forces" in her life, but also sets the forces in motion. If the film were merely about the passing from a state of singleness through courtship to marriage it would not contain the

resonance it does and probably could not be discussed in the context of Chris Knight's theory. As Robert McKee puts it, for "many stories or genres" it is sufficient that the "inciting incident" or "event"

itches the protagonist's life out of kilter, arousing a conscious desire for something he feels will set things right, and he goes after it.

But for those protagonists we tend to admire the most, the Inciting Incident arouses not only a conscious desire, but an unconscious one as well. These complex characters suffer intense inner battles because these two desires are in direct conflict with each other. No matter what the character consciously thinks he wants, the audience senses or realizes that deep inside he unconsciously wants the very opposite. (McKee 1998: 192)

This description may not only be applied to the most interesting films (not necessarily the most coherent) but to the comments made earlier about the mutual exclusivity of the "two worlds" in agricultural societies (and beyond). *Cat People* may be regarded on the personal level as a conflict in a woman between a conscious and unconscious desire which appear to be incompatible; more broadly, it might be regarded as a conflict between a modern, secular age in which marriage is of supreme value and the memories and stirrings of an older social order associated with blood kinship and female solidarity. Once Irena decides she wants to go after one desire, the other, opposed desire quickly begins to assert itself in her.

Irena is European, a foreigner from an "old world" consciously trying to belong in the "new world" of America; in this sense, her ideal is Alice, Oliver's work colleague and fellow-American, who has no stirrings of allegiance to any order beyond that which is. But while this is something for which Irena strives (since it appears to be the American "norm", and thus the "natural" thing to want), something else asserts itself in her against her conscious will. It is the reason for her doubts about marriage to Oliver ("I've lived in dread of this moment", she tells him, while also revealing how she must have imagined it, at one level longed for it; but she goes on: "I've never wanted to love you. I've stayed away from people. I lived alone. I didn't want this to happen."). The "return of the repressed" is highlighted most obviously at Irena and Oliver's wedding supper. Ironically, it is the "normal" Alice who has found a Serbian restaurant in New York, of which Irena was ignorant, for the celebration. It is in this scene that the "other world" comes closest to definite articulation, although even here it still hovers on the verge of consciousness. It is crucial that it is at the occasion of Irena's consciously desired marriage that her unconscious desire against her marriage, personified



Simone Simon and Tom Conway in Jacques Tourneur's *Cat People*.

by her "sister", should make itself known:

MALE GUEST: To the bride!

(They all drink a toast.)

MALE GUEST (to another): Look at that woman. Isn't she something?

SECOND MALE GUEST: Looks like a cat.

(The cat-like woman gets up from her table.)

IRENA: Thank you so much for this lovely party, Alice. I didn't know there was a Serbian restaurant.

ALICE: Anything you want to know about this city, ask me. I know all the unimportant details.

(The cat-like woman now faces Irena and Alice, and addresses Irena.)

WOMAN (in Serbian): My sister.

(Irena is afraid and does not answer.)

WOMAN (again in Serbian): My sister?

(Irena crosses herself. The woman leaves. There is a sigh of relief from everyone and the celebrating continues.)

ALICE: Well, how do you like that!

OLIVER (to Irena): What did that woman say to you, darling?

(Irena does not answer.)

OLIVER (to Irena): What did she say? Now wait a minute, it can't be that serious. Just one single word.

IRENA: She greeted me. She called me sister. You saw her, Oliver. You saw what she looked like.

OLIVER (laughs): Oh, the cat people! She looks like a cat, so she must be one of the cat people! One of King John's pets! (nudging Irena's chin) Oh, Irena, you crazy kid! (00:16-00:18)

Instead of complementarity of worlds, we encounter here a collision of worlds. What was originally a coherent alternation is now presented as mutually exclusive alternatives. It is Irena's strength and downfall that she cannot choose between them. Their opposing claims force her to her death. None of the other characters shares her dilemma. They are either completely immersed in the "new" world of secular, "ovulatory" values (Oliver, Alice, their work colleagues) or otherwise locked into the "other" world of ritual seclusion (the woman in the restaurant, the panther in the zoo). Joel Siegel provides the interesting information that the voice of the cat-like woman—who appears only in this one scene—was dubbed by Simone Simon, who plays Irena (Siegel 1972: 103).

On a conscious level, Irena wants to dismiss the "sister" in the restaurant. By crossing herself she hopes to ward off the influence of pre-Christian ritual forces. But while the others do not take the woman seriously, Irena is much affected by her appearance. It is no accident that in the following scene, when she and Oliver go back together to his apartment, she makes her apologies for not being able to consummate the marriage:

OLIVER: What is it, darling?

IRENA: I'm going to beg . . .

OLIVER: Mrs. Reed.

IRENA: It's nice to hear that. Nice. I want to be Mrs. Reed.

OLIVER: You are.

IRENA: But I want to be Mrs. Reed really. I want to be everything that name means to me. And I can't. I can't. Oliver, be kind, be patient. Let me have time. Time to get over that feeling there's something evil in me.

OLIVER: Darling, you have all the time there is in the world if you want it. And all the patience and kindness there is in me.

IRENA: Only a little time, Oliver, I don't want more than that. (Inside their apartment, Oliver knocks on her bedroom door.)

OLIVER: Goodnight, Irena.

(Irena crouches down by the door, wanting to grasp the handle and open it. But the sound of a panther in the zoo nearby prevents her from doing so, and she rests her head in resignation against the door.)

IRENA: Goodnight, Oliver.

OLIVER (quieter): Goodnight, Irena.

(Oliver moves away from the door sadly. In her room, Irena remains with her head resting against the door.)

(00:18-00:20)

Irena here expresses a conscious desire to be "Mrs. Reed", a woman who defines herself exclusively as a wife, as someone who belongs exclusively to a man (and so to the world of marriage). She is able, however, to acknowledge the presence of another world, one that she can only define as "evil", since it has nothing to do with Oliver and the sweet values of the "good plain Americano" (his self-description) which he

embodies. To her this other world must be evil because it does not belong in the value-system of modern America, her and our touchstone of normality. It is defined instead only in relation to animals and other women (a "sister").

Apparently, Val Lewton, the originator of the story for *Cat People*, got his inspiration from contemporary fashion drawings rather than from memories of folk-tales from his eastern European origins (Siegel 1972: 102). Nevertheless, there can be no denying its similarity to numerous European folk or fairy-tales in which the wife is unavailable to her husband because she has been transformed into an animal. Isabel Cardigos, in her extensive study of blood symbolism and gender in Portuguese fairy-tales, *In And Out Of Enchantment*, mentions a number of variants on the tale of the "Swan Maiden", for example, which may have "ancient North-Eurasian shamanic origins" (Cardigos 1996: 167). Also known as stories of "The Man on a Quest for his Lost Wife", they may be summarized, according to A.T. Hatto, as follows:

A man forces a bird-maiden to become his wife by stealing her feather-robe while she is bathing, thus preventing her from flying off. The pair have children, and one day the bird-woman recovers her feather-robe and flies away with them. As a sequel, the man may pursue her to the other place to which she returned (Cardigos 1996: 167).

Cardigos goes on to say that these "Swan Maiden" tales are concerned with marriage before initiation. The man prevents the woman from being able to transform herself by stealing her clothes. Irena, living alone in New York before meeting Oliver, is someone who has not been through her initiation ritual, yet who senses its necessity for her. Oliver may be said to "steal" from her the opportunity for this initiation. For this reason the marriage cannot succeed, since for traditional societies initiation must always precede marriage. In this way, Irena refuses to consummate her marriage. The scene of Irena and Oliver together as husband and wife yet separated by a door on their wedding night, framed on either side by scenes in which the "other world" impinges itself (the "cat-woman" at the meal, the actual panther in the zoo the following morning) is symptomatic of a collision of worlds, neither of which can satisfy her exclusively. As Robin Wood remarks of the bedroom scene and the following scene at the zoo:

the door that separated Irena from Oliver is paralleled by the cage that separates her from the panther: divided between two worlds, she is barred from access to either (Wood 1976: 216).

It may be noted that the bedroom scene bears a certain similarity to the climax of *The Awful Truth* (1937), defined by Stanley Cavell in *Pursuits of Happiness* as one of Hollywood's "comedies of remarriage". Here the door separating the man from the woman is held in place by a black cat (which he identifies too simply with female sexuality rather than with kinship or symbolic incest bonds). Unlike *Cat People*, and more like a companion "remarriage comedy" *Bringing Up Baby* (1938), the woman does not metamorphose into an animal but an animal is associated with her state of non-marital availability to the man. What is meant by "non-marital availability" is the sense that the couple, in their temporary estrange-

ment, become "available" to each other in a way which is more closely associated with kinship than marriage, hence symbolically incestuous. In *The Awful Truth* the philandering husband who wishes to return to his wife is allowed to do so (she eventually shoos the cat away at the right time, just before their divorce is supposed to become legally binding, and he is able to enter her bedroom, suitably contrite). The scene is accompanied by a celebrated "same, only different" dialogue, in which marital bonds are revealed to be strengthened by having been temporarily severed. Only here, unlike in *Cat People*, both partners become "strangers" to each other (they suffer a divorce) before getting back together again. The wife reinvents herself to impersonate the husband's imaginary sister, a low-life singer-dancer with an erotic charge which may be connected to the fact of impersonation. Mythological elements are implied by the fact that the relationship is magically restored in Connecticut, a "world elsewhere" which "has its own laws and its entry demands a new mode, or new vehicle, of transport" (Cavell 1981:253), and which Cavell compares to the motorcycles in Cocteau's *Orphee*. In the realm of "comic enchantment", problems can be resolved. The marriage is set on a firmer footing since the separation has provided an equivalent to initiation, except that this initiation is an initiation into a deeper knowledge of the other partner's character, their "interestingness", rather than an initiation into kinship or blood relations (with those who are *not* one's marital partner).

To return to *Cat People*: as I mentioned, the initiation necessary here to set the marriage on "a firmer footing" is not available through any adjustment in the marriage itself. Oliver, unlike the husband in *The Awful Truth*, is separated from his wife by a gulf of knowledge and lacks all imagination to be able to deal with it except dismissively ("Irena, you crazy kid!"). While the couple in *The Awful Truth* may be said to create a gulf in order to become freshly interesting to each other, the couple in *Cat People* are never at any point intimate enough even to approach such a need. For Oliver, Irena's strange behaviour, while in some way the source of her fascination for him (as Susan is for David in *Bringing Up Baby*), is not something he can understand nor be content not to understand. He tells Alice:

I'm drawn to her. There's a warmth from her that pulls at me. I have to watch her when she's in the room. I have to touch her when she's near. But I don't really know her. In many ways we're strangers. (00:34)

Irena, it seems—unconsciously, no doubt—exerts a hypnotic power over her husband that we might want to call "glamorous", bringing to bear that word's original meaning of a female magic spell which involves a transformation in the female's appearance. Alice, who lacks such a quality, replies: "You and I, we'll never be strangers". It is Alice who suggests a psychiatrist, Dr. Judd, to find a cure for Irena's strangeness (or otherwise to commit her to an institution if there is no cure). After listening to Irena, Judd explicitly announces the theme of metamorphosis by informing Irena that she believes she is descended from a race of "cat women (who) in jealousy or anger or out of their corrupt passions change into great cats" who are "driven to kill by (their) own evil if kissed or made love to".

Although meant to be an elucidation of Irena's problem,

Judd's words actually confuse two different motives which are to engage the remainder of the film: a fundamental inability to consummate the marriage because of some deeper kinship (as seen earlier in the wedding night bedroom scene) and sexual jealousy. The fact of Irena's sexual jealousy of Alice was never previously apparent (although it is true that Irena would be at some level envious of Alice's easy negotiation of the society in which she lives), but from this point it takes over as perhaps the dominant engine of the plot. This is to be regretted, insofar as it represses the more "archetypal" theme of metamorphosis as anti-marital kin solidarity to highlight the more mundane theme of female rivalry for a banal and unimaginative man. The 1982 remake, as well as the almost identical mermaid story, *Night Tide* (1963), are for this reason (although not for others) to be preferred from our point of view. It might be argued, however, that the mention of "jealousy", first made by Judd, simply plants itself in Irena's mind to rationalise to herself the motive for her own metamorphoses; when in fact the underlying motive is not possible to rationalise in terms of the value system to which she consciously desires to adhere since it is itself an expression of an older value system.

Subsequently, in the film's one dream sequence, Dr. Judd appears to Irena as King John, the Christian knight who rid Serbia of its cats (an obvious variation on the St. George and the Dragon story). Here the theme of opposed forces is most discernible: for a Christian society to impose itself, it must eliminate the previous social pattern (in which animal metamorphosis would seem to have been a commonplace) as well as denounce it as evil (cf. depictions of the Devil as an animal). When Irena metamorphoses into the panther to threaten Oliver and Alice in the office, it is thus appropriate that the man and woman (symbolically at least husband and wife, since Oliver's actual wife is not at that moment of the same species) should protect themselves by holding up a T-square as a crucifix. As with the vampire (a closely connected figure), this is guaranteed to have an effect, and Irena mutates back to herself, only to mutate back to panther form soon afterwards when Dr. Judd kisses her (the knight confident enough to tame the dragon). As with the kiss at the end of *Sleeping Beauty*, this kiss clinches the action of the story. But while in *Sleeping Beauty* it returns the initiated princess to "this world" of marriage ("heterosexual polarity"), for the uninitiated Irena it precipitates her last metamorphosis, her murder of Judd, her own death and that of the caged panther in the zoo which she releases. The final quotation from John Donne's *Holy Sonnets* ("My world, both parts, and both parts must die") clearly foregrounds the dilemma of the incompatible worlds which its protagonist was condemned to live out until they destroyed her.

Tourneur's film conjures up an atmosphere of strange forces at work beneath the everyday, and though the supposed explanation (proffered by the generally unsympathetic Judd) of sexual jealousy may mitigate its poetic power, it does not dissipate it altogether (and is, indeed, like so much in the film, capable of several, and possibly quite opposed, interpretations). *Night Tide*, the 1982 remake of *Cat People* as well as numerous vampire films make it more plain that the dilemma of the (female) protagonist is between (human) marriage and incestuous attachment to kin (or the blood).

To confirm its resemblance to *Cat People*, in one crucial dialogue in *Night Tide*, Captain Murdock, the adopted father of



Simone Simon and expressionist lighting.

Nora "the mermaid", refers to her as one of the "sea people", proceeding to outline to the naïve sailor protagonist (Johnny) the classical myth of the Sirens. The film actually combines two distinct legends, the legend of the mermaid or "merry-maid" (see *The Sea Enchantress* by G. Benwell and A. Waugh) who is half-woman, half-fish, of which there are numerous variants; and the specific account of the Greek sirens, who were half-human and half-bird (according to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*), who lived on an island and used their voices

to lure sailors to their deaths. The habitation of the sea and the enchantment of song are common to both, however, and bear obvious similarities to the function of female-initiated anti-courtship ritual in Knight's model of cultural origins.

Like the unimaginative Oliver in *Cat People*, Johnny is from the outset drawn to a solitary, "other-wordly" woman. The first scene in the jazz club sets up the basic conflict of the film: the sailor introduces himself to a solitary woman (Mora), who is not unresponsive until the beginnings of a conversation are

abruptly interrupted by the appearance of a strange-looking woman (cf. the "cat-woman" in the restaurant in *Cat People*) who speaks to Mora in an unknown language, causing her to leave the club at once. The man's attempt at courtship is apparently foiled by another woman, but he persists, following her to her home above a merry-go-round on a pier. She does not invite him in, but says he can come to breakfast the following morning. When he does so, he finds the room full of things collected from the ocean, and they eat a fish breakfast on a balcony overlooking the sea. Mora's home, perilously situated in a transitional zone between land and sea/marriage and ritual, might be compared to Irena's apartment, which is within earshot of Central Park Zoo. Like Irena, she is also an émigré from eastern Europe (in this case, Greece). Mora tells Johnny, an inexperienced sailor who has not even been to the coast before arriving in Venice, California, that she is "a mermaid: half woman, half fish". She refers to how she makes her living on the pier, as an attraction which people pay 25 cents to look at in her mermaid costume in a tank of water. The man who manages it, Captain Murdock, is an old seafarer who tells Johnny he found Mora on an island, an orphan and "a lovely siren of the deep". Johnny is intrigued, entranced, in love. At a nocturnal beach party (the beach, like her home, being another transitional zone) Mora proves herself a wonderful dancer. The foreign woman from the jazz club appears again, and Mora faints on seeing her. Johnny sees the woman too, but when he looks for her she has disappeared.

As in *Cat People*, the protagonist takes solace in the company of another woman, in this case the daughter of the proprietor of the merry-go-round, whose love for him (like Alice's for Oliver) is not requited whilst he is in the grip of an obsession. When Johnny questions Captain Murdock, the Captain tells him the story of the Sirens, "who in ancient days used to lure the seafaring men to their destruction". For the Captain these are not merely silly stories, since "myths spring from truth, ancient truth, living truth". The myth keeps itself alive in Mora, who is "a monster", a member of that "ancient race", just as Irena is directly descended from the cat people. As in *Cat People*, the myth would seem to keep itself alive in the contemporary world on a disturbingly literal level. The woman does actually change her skin to become a member of another species; again, this change involves identification with same-sex kin, not "heterosexual polarity".

For Mora, however, the change occurs not at the point when her human mate wants to make love with her (or when she is provoked by sexual jealousy), but when the tides and the moon are at their most pronounced:

MORA (looking out of her window toward the ocean): I didn't want you to know. It was right of him to tell you, but I didn't want you to know. Now I suppose I . . . won't see you any more?

JOHNNY: Mora, you don't think I believed him, do you?

MORA: But it's true, Johnny. They are waiting for me to join them. You've seen one of them.

JOHNNY: Do you mean that woman?

MORA: You saw how she looked at me. How she spoke to me. She's one of them. She's one of the Sea People, and she's here to remind me of the time that I must go to them in the sea.

JOHNNY (beckoning Mora to the bed): Look Mora, I don't

know how or where you got these ideas, but they're wrong. You see, these things don't happen.

MORA: Oh Johnny, if only they didn't! If only they couldn't happen! You Americans have such a simple view of the world. You think that everything can be seen and touched and weighed and measured. You think you've discovered reality but you don't even know what it is.

JOHNNY: You mean everything Sam (i.e. Captain Murdock) told me is the truth?

MORA: Almost everything.

JOHNNY: Will you just tell me how you know?

(Mora gets up from the bed and turns away from Johnny.)

MORA: Because I feel the sea-water in my veins. Because I listen to the roar of the sea and it speaks to me like a mother's voice. The tide pulls at my heart. The face of the moon fills my soul with a strange longing.

(Mora picks up a shell and returns to the bed.)

JOHNNY: Mora, I don't understand.

MORA: Try to understand, and forgive me.

JOHNNY (putting the shell to his ear): I haven't listened to one of these since I was a kid. My grandmother used to have one of these on her dresser. It does sound like the ocean, doesn't it?

MORA: When I made the voyage to this country from Greece, I carried such a shell with me over the land. In that way I kept the sea always with me. Always close. Johnny, I'm so afraid!

JOHNNY (holds her): Don't be afraid. Look, I don't know what this is all about, but I know that I'm here and we'll work this out. (00:45-00:50)

This scene, like the first scene of the film in the jazz club, indicates that the female protagonist's dilemma is between the conscious desire for a heterosexual partner, and the unconscious desire (or compulsion) for kin solidarity; and that the two things are mutually exclusive. Unlike Irena, it seems that Mora has been to the "sea people" before. She would seem to have had her initiation, but is not able to marry permanently since the moon and tides pull at her periodically. If initiation is involved, it is the sailor's initiation into Mora's female "mysteries": the fortune-teller tells him in the following scene that he is "a young man, innocent and searching", this being indicated by the drawing of the moon-card ("a journey into the unknown"). But it remains uncertain whether Johnny is capable of initiation. Like Oliver in *Cat People*, he is a modern American for whom reality is simply what is "out there": as Mora tells him (oddly, perhaps, since she is also in love with him) he does not even know what reality is. His response to the shell which he, without any awareness of significance, connects to the female line of his family, is particularly banal ("It does sound like the ocean, doesn't it?"). The fortune-teller on the pier tells him that "a great awakening is possible. After the sacred mystery of death there is the glorious mystery of resurrection". But this idea of journey-and-return, intrinsic to the earliest myths, is not repeated in this modern variation. As in *Cat People*, the journey is one way to death for the woman. Johnny wants Mora on dry land, while she wants him to go with her into the sea (she suggests a diving trip at full moon). He escapes back to the boat, to see her next at the mermaid attraction on the pier—dead. The Captain implies that he

killed her himself out of jealousy and, indeed, made up the whole story of the "sea people" to frighten other men away from Mora and make her afraid of being with them; but he denies all knowledge of any other woman being complicit with him.

The ending remains ambiguous: we are free to choose between a rational explanation which dissipates all the mystery (it was all a simple tale of possessiveness on the old captain's part) or an absence of explanation which retains the mystery (there really are people who live under the sea who can sometimes metamorphose into humans, despite a lack of scientific proof). According to Knight's model, however, originally it was the enactment of myth in periodic ritual which created a mystery or illusion (an "other world") for which no explanation was required (since it was a part of life-experience). It is only after that original social structure has changed that we begin to search for an explanation, since the earliest myths (or story structures) no longer mirror the new social structure. And "mystery" (metaphysics) and "explanation" (science) become two poles between which we must choose; unless we accept that Knight's model explains the mystery by explaining the original necessity for the mystery in symbolic deception. Thus the mystery is not explained away so much as fully elucidated.

The 1982 remake of *Cat People* heightens the theme of kin solidarity as the motive for Irena's inability to marry or lose her virginity, but also redundantly includes scenes from the original film which foreground her jealousy of Alice. By creating the new character of the brother (a religious fanatic), the remake improves on the original by clearly posing Irena's dilemma as a choice between kin/mate. On the other hand, it makes very little of the cat-like woman in the restaurant (here in the equivalent scene Irena is only with Alice, to whom she reveals she is a virgin, so the disruptive force of the scene in the original version is totally lost) and interprets Irena's virginity too literally as fear of sexuality (as opposed to need for autonomy from her "marital" partner). Oliver is now a zookeeper, and Alice his work colleague. Irena spends time at the zoo, attracted to the caged leopard ("Because of its history it's not meant for breeding", Oliver tells her). Her brother has temporarily disappeared, while a leopard has been on the rampage killing prostitutes (making love with anyone outside his kin initiates his metamorphoses); when he returns he tells Irena she does not really love Oliver: indeed, she cannot love him because she is not like him (not one of his kind). Irena, like her namesake in the original, is caught between the two mutually exclusive worlds of animal and human, kin solidarity and marriage, consciously desiring the latter but being dragged back to the former.

Oliver takes Irena to his coastal hideaway but she cannot make love; instead she metamorphoses into a leopard and comes back to herself with blood on her mouth. She cannot remember what has happened in the intervening period and can only think that she is going mad. Her brother later explains that she and he are the offspring of a brother and sister, that their ancestors sacrificed children to the leopards and that the children's souls grew inside until they became human—"and they were gods". "They were incestuous, can only make love with their own, otherwise they transform—and before they can become human again they must kill." Unfortunately, this "explanation" does not explain why souls inside animals are

divine; nor, indeed, the reason for the incestuousness.

By making the incest literal rather than symbolic (which it primarily must have been for original ritual "sex-strike" potency, although close bodily contact and possible non-fertile bonding may well have occurred), the film heightens the sense that only certain people (in this case apparently only a brother and sister) can metamorphose. Everyone else is excluded from this divine capacity, although (like the vampire) this capacity appears to be more a curse than a blessing. The necessity for killing before transforming back to human form is also implied in *Night Tide* (Mora's two previous boyfriends are dead), and may be obviously related to the "kill" at the climax of the hunt (at full moon), which signals the end of the ritual coalition and the return from kin bonds to "marital" bonds. It is this "killing", indeed, which marks the swing from the "divine/animal" (sacred) to the "human" (profane) pole in Knight's model. Thus, after finally making love with Oliver, Irena transforms into a leopard and escapes to Oliver's boat-house, where she kills the boat-owner and changes back to human form (the first time she did so, apparently, it was the blood of an animal she had on her lips; it does not seem to matter what species is killed, the fact of killing being sufficient to end the metamorphosis.). Finally, she makes love to Oliver for the last time, and is tied up so that she cannot kill anymore, and so cannot change back to her human form. Instead of dying (the only way in which the dilemma of the original Irena and Mora can be ended) this time Irena transforms into a leopard permanently, after which Oliver spends more time feeding her in her cage than being with the long-suffering, permanently human Alice. However, it may be concluded that being stuck in the "other world" is in effect no better than being dead, since there is no longer any connection with the things of "this world": the "sacred" is a caged animal, which the keeper keeps caged for its own good, knowing that if he lets it out it will only kill and be killed.

All three variants of the same story, in other words, end up highlighting the apparently unrealizable nature of their female protagonists' contradictory desires; yet I hope to have suggested that in traditional hunter-gatherer societies before the onset of agriculture and the last ice age, such desires would have been eminently capable of realization (and not "contradictory" at all) as part of a cyclical social structure in which pairing off and blood kinship were the two poles.

N.B. Quotations from the films are time-coded in hours and minutes.

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On and Around *My Best Friend's Wedding*

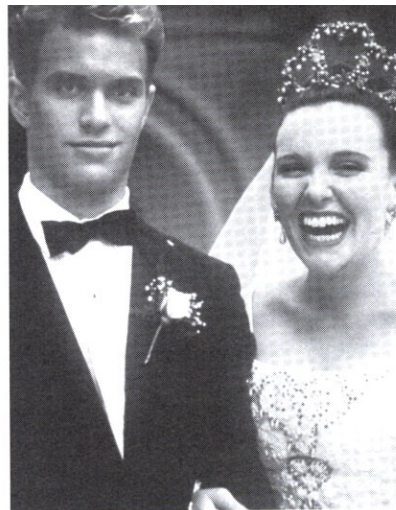
by Robin Wood

I want to discuss *My Best Friend's Wedding* in relation to three associated topics: its relation to classic screwball comedy and the other recent attempts to rethink that genre in contemporary terms; its auteurist relationship with *Muriel's Wedding*; and the current widespread uses of gay characters in contemporary comedies. As this article will accordingly be more 'around' than 'on', I had better begin by saying plainly that I love the film: if not 'profound' or in any of the more obvious ways 'ground-breaking', it seems to me a flawless and progressive example of its genre, giving continuous delight.

1. Screwball ancient and modern

We all recognize certain films as 'screwball', yet the term requires definition; the simplest way to define it is to situate it between the 'romantic' comedy and the 'crazy' or 'slapstick' comedy, as it clearly relates to both while remaining distinct from either, its distinctness arising perhaps from the ways in which it borrows and combines elements from each. McCarey provides the ideal touchstones, as he produced outstanding examples of all three categories: *Duck Soup*, the ideal crazy comedy, *Love Affair* or its remake *An Affair to Remember* the ideal romantic, and *The Awful Truth* among the greatest screwballs.

At the heart of both 'screwball' and 'romantic' is the romantic couple, generally absent from or marginal to 'crazy' (although Chaplin and Lloyd always had romantic 'interests' their films are celebrated primarily for the comedians' performances, set-pieces and skills; although Laurel and Hardy might at a stretch be seen as a romantic couple, the stretch would be a very long one; and I don't think anyone would label the various courtships of Groucho and Margaret Dumont 'romantic' exactly). This is why the distinction is not always clearcut. A rough but



right: *Muriel's Wedding*: Toni Collette gets what she thinks she wants.

below: Kimmy (Cameron Diaz) helps to dress her Maid of (Dis-) Honour (Julia Roberts).



sufficiently accurate way of putting it might suggest that the romantic comedy is primarily *about* the construction of the ideal romantic couple, while the screwball comedy is primarily about liberation (and the couple it constructs is often very short of the romantic ideal—see, for example, *Bringing up Baby* or *The Lady Eve*—or *Too Many Husbands*, which audaciously constructs a threesome): the overthrow of social convention, of bourgeois notions of respectability, of traditional gender roles (the resolution of *My Best Friend's Wedding* is already clearly in view). This is precisely where 'screwball' links to 'crazy'—to the anarchy of the Marx Brothers, or the (often inadvertent) destruction of social norms, homes and property in Laurel and Hardy: plausibility is much less an issue in 'screwball' than in 'romantic'. *The Awful Truth* might be taken as the perfect midpoint between the two, 'crazy' and 'romantic' held meticulously in balance.

The most interesting aspect of this movement toward liberation, the overthrow of norms, is the recurrent emphasis in screwball (the theme, one might claim, of the best screwballs) on the emancipation and empowerment of women. Hence *The Awful Truth* is essentially about (in Andrew Britton's words) 'the chastisement of male presumption' and the progress of the couple toward equality. The most extreme instance—hence the closest of all the screwballs to 'crazy'—is of course *Bringing up Baby*, singlemindedly concerned with Cary Grant's liberation at the merciless hands of Katharine Hepburn, and culminating with faultless logic in that still potent image of the overthrow of patriarchy, the collapse of the dinosaur skeleton into 'nothing but a heap of old bones', to misquote Hepburn from earlier in the film. Other notable examples: *The Lady Eve*, *Two-Faced Woman* (the original version, not the bowdlerized horror currently available on video—see Richard Lippe on this in *CineAction* 35), and (on a lower level of achievement) *Theodora Goes Wild* and *Too Many Husbands*, in which Jean Arthur, despite having been compelled by the patriarchal legal system to choose between Fred MacMurray and Melvyn Douglas, ends up keeping them both. From this viewpoint, these films are more progressive, subversive and potentially revolutionary than anything Hollywood is turning out today. This becomes particularly clear when one considers the recent attempt at screwball that most obviously corresponds to the classic model: *Forces of Nature*, where the model is patently *Bringing up Baby*. The film was generally attacked (reasonably enough) for its ineptness and the actors' total lack of chemistry or charisma, but its real crime is the betrayal of its Hawksian forerunner: instead of progressing toward liberation, its characters simply learn to be older and wiser, a condition which presumably renders liberation superfluous.

Screwball comedies are no longer concerned with women's empowerment, following the widespread social assumption that women don't need to be empowered any more, they've won all their battles and they're empowered quite sufficiently, thank you. Meanwhile, I open my newspaper every morning to read about all the battered, raped and/or murdered women who have been battered, raped and murdered by men, most commonly their husbands or male lovers; about all the single mothers struggling in poverty, driven up to or over the brink of homelessness; the closing of women's shelters and of daycare centres following the withdrawal of government funding; the struggles of women to

secure tenured positions or promotion in universities, and their struggle everywhere to secure equal pay for equal work; their virtual exclusion from the upper echelons of male-controlled capitalism, unless they are committed to supporting the further empowerment of men; or, conversely, the enormously greater number of female secretaries, servants, housecleaners than male. The only contemporary screwball comedy to treat this subject responsibly has been generally ignored: *The Associate*, flawed by faulty construction and indifferent direction but distinguished by splendid performances by Whoopi Goldberg and Dianne Wiest. The film's attack on the subordination and exploitation of women (and of blacks) within the overwhelmingly white-male-dominated structures of our financial institutions and corporations is crude but devastating.

Yet, if the great underlying subject of classic screwball has now been declared officially obsolete by the current capitalist/patriarchal conspiracy, the genre itself has, by a process of mutation, at its best replaced it with other concerns apparently distinct from it yet clearly relevant to it: the assault on the traditional bastions of marriage, family, biological parentage, sexuality and gender. If the problems of women are now officially 'solved', then the problems that are so intimately and intricately involved in women's continuing oppression—indeed, they form its basis—are now being exposed to criticism as never before. I have particularly in mind *Flirting with Disaster*, *The Daytrippers* and *My Best Friend's Wedding*.

Our civilization has come a long way since the great days of screwball: a long way toward potential and perhaps imminent cataclysm: we have had World War II, the threat of nuclear annihilation, the devastation of the environment by the joint (if opposed) forces of advanced capitalism and Soviet-style Communist Totalitarianism, with the apparently insatiable greed of those who believe that the possession of vast hoards of money by a few justifies the social misery of millions and the possible end of life on the planet. Accordingly, its basic structures—social, political, ideological—and the structures of social/sexual organization that are at once their product and sustenance are provoking increasingly greater anxiety, discontent, disturbance: it cannot be stressed too often (as so few appear to listen) that there is a clear and logical connection between the patriarchal nuclear family and the dominant socioeconomic/political structures. Given capitalism's continuing power, especially its power to keep its populations in a condition of chronic mystification through the media it essentially controls, this disturbance crystallizes into fully conscious opposition only among a small minority, but the inchoate *sense* of dissatisfaction is by now virtually all-pervasive, especially among the younger generations. Because the dissatisfaction can't be consciously formulated it expresses itself only in cynicism and impotent forms of rebellion. Yet the disillusionment with our traditional, fundamental institutions—marriage and family, the organization of gender and sexuality—is discernible everywhere. It structures the best contemporary screwball comedies as surely as the empowerment of women structured the classics of the 1930s and 40s.

The most complete and rigorous working through of this is clearly *The Daytrippers*, perhaps the most shockingly neglected American film of the past decade, little known, seldom screened, currently accessible only on a 'formatted to fit

your TV screen' video. Never screwball, and by its end no longer even a comedy, it has an archetypal screwball premise and narrative structure: wife, after tender and affectionate early morning scene with husband, sees him off to his office, then finds (while doing the housework) a love note signed 'Sandy' under the bed. Distraught, she enlists the aid of her mother, who in turn enlists father, younger sister and younger sister's fiancé for a trip into the city to confront the errant husband *en masse*. One can even see how this might have been cast, in the heyday of screwball in its more conservative 'family' mode: William Powell as the husband, Myrna Loy or Irene Dunne as the wife, Mary Boland and Charlie Ruggles as the parents, Ann Rutherford as the younger sister... There would have been a series of hilarious misadventures, the husband, finally tracked down, would explain that 'it was all a mistake', and familial and conjugal solidarity would be restored, confirmed by the promise of the younger couple's imminent wedding. *The Daytrippers* systematically reverses this pattern: the journey, starting in early morning, ending in very late night, is a steady progress into darkness and disintegration. By the end, both the marriage and the engagement have broken up, the family has fallen irremediably apart, and the two sisters walk off together into the night. As usual with American narrative movies, all this allows itself to be read in purely individual terms (*this* particular marriage, *this* family, etc.), but it in no way forbids a symbolic reading, as a 'fable for our time' (the family is clearly presented as 'typical'). Perhaps the reason why it is the most radical of current screwball (or screwball-derived) comedies is because it is the furthest from its models, in tone and narrative progression.

My Best Friend's Wedding is obviously more lightweight, truer to the screwball spirit. But beneath its more frivolous, less openly subversive, surface it relates clearly enough to the same tendencies.

2. What *My Best Friend* has in common with *Muriel's*.

Muriel's Wedding was both written and directed by P.J.Hogan; on *My Best Friend's Wedding* he has only the director's credit. I have no information on why exactly he was invited to Hollywood (though obviously the critical and popular success of the Australian film had a great deal to do with it), or on how he came to direct the film he did: was it his choice (from a range of possible screenplays or subjects offered), was it chosen for him as some kind of specialist in weddings, to what extent did he control or contribute to the evolution of the final screenplay? If the finished screenplay was simply handed to him with a 'Direct *this*', then we are dealing with a most remarkable coincidence: despite their enormous differences (in tone, milieu, characterization), the structures of the two films reveal striking similarities. The differences can be accounted for by the change in national and social milieu and the different possibilities offered by the American and Australian cinemas and their very divergent inflections of the comic genre. At risk of treading upon sensitive nationalist toes, I have to say that most of the Australian films I've seen come across as terrible warnings: 'Never, never emigrate to Australia. Don't even contemplate it. At best you'll be screamed at and victimized, and at worst forcibly sodomized by Donald Pleasance.' (Let me add that I could say much the same about the cinema of my own home country, England).

The contrast between the sophistication and nuance of *My Best Friend's Wedding* and the in-your-face crudity of its predecessor are impossible to account for in terms simply of authorial sensibility.

The trajectory common to both films can be summed up as follows: a woman becomes obsessed (for quite different reasons) with a particular wedding, real or fantasized (her own purely hypothetical one—Muriel/Toni Collette—and that of the man she has suddenly realized she loves—Julianne or 'Jules'/Julia Roberts). In both cases, though, the woman wants the wedding to be her own—for Muriel it is a status symbol that will at last gain her some respect, for Jules the means of possessing the man she loves, coloured by the even more ignoble desire to get her own way, her behaviour at times suggesting that of the little girl who stamps her foot and cries 'I want it!!! I want it!!!'. Each female protagonist is obsessed with a particular song that offers her a fantasy image of herself: Abba's 'Dancing Queen' for Muriel, 'Just the way you look tonight' for Jules; and in both films the song returns in the final sequences as a signifier of her liberation from obsession. In both films the woman's obsessiveness drives her increasingly into selfish and irresponsible behaviour that takes no account of other people's feelings and which she ultimately recognizes as a betrayal of her own finer ones. The wedding brings disillusionment and with it liberation: she begins to look at herself and examine her behaviour, and to free herself of her obsession. Most remarkable is the congruence of the endings: Both films end with the heroine reunited with the character who has come to represent her conscience, but who also, significantly, is an outsider-figure, set apart by a marked 'difference', with whom she appears to be cementing a permanent relationship but whom she cannot possibly marry, and whose personal situation (crippled, gay) places both in a position where they can view the social milieu, its traditions and behaviour-patterns, objectively and critically. One might say that they are presented as the most admirable characters of their respective films precisely *because* they can't marry—can't, that is, participate in their culture's central principle of organization.

The films share an extremely jaundiced view of weddings and their function, and beyond that, implicitly, of marriage. This is expressed quite blatantly in *Muriel*, and is somewhat gentler and more circumspect in *Best Friend*, where the tone is established at the outset by that charming, hilarious, satirical credit sequence. Our confidence in the Dermot Mulroney/Cameron Diaz marriage is subtly but thoroughly undermined: the pair are obviously mismatched, their interests totally incompatible (reminiscent, in fact, of Stewart and Kelly in *Rear Window*!) in the archetypal manner of our culture, adventurer vs. settler. Jules is able to undermine their apparent stability at her first serious attempt, the instant quarrel she negotiates only resolved by the woman's instant and total capitulation to the man's needs. And the central sequence on the sightseeing launch makes it clear that the prospective groom's attachment to Jules remains considerably more than friendly and can be reignited quite easily. In view of this the film's final celebration of the traditional couple, as they depart for their honeymoon with the aid of romantic music, slow motion, confetti and sudden gushing fountains of fireworks, must be read as part-ironic, part an aspect of the film's generosity, a tribute to the essential nice-

ness and excellent intentions of its characters: the effect might be summed up as 'You haven't a hope but we wish you well.'

Performance/Structure

Though generally liked, *My Best Friend's Wedding* has not received anything like the recognition it deserves. It is one of the great American comedies, comparable in its perfection with the finest 'classic' screwballs, perfectly written, perfectly cast, perfectly acted, perfectly directed. I have watched it at least half-a-dozen times, replaying whole sequences for the sheer pleasure of the nuances of timing and the ensemble playing. It is continuously *alive*, down to the smallest detail: when one has watched (for example) the scene in the karaoke bar, or the sequence of the eve of wedding luncheon party, a few times, one suddenly begins to notice the extras: there is no 'dead' space on the screen, every visible extra in the crowded bar or restaurant is caught up in the overall performance. The four principals are beyond praise. If Roberts and Everett strike one most immediately, that is because they have the showiest roles; their performances are matched by those of Diaz and Mulroney.

The film is built upon a dual structure: the shifting and evolving relationships between Julianne and the two men in her life, Michael (Mulroney) and George (Everett). Both relationships are introduced, with great economy, at the outset: Julianne, a prestigious food columnist and critic, is dining out with George, her editor (the 'date' combines work and pleasure, as she is reviewing the restaurant); during the meal

she checks her messages on her cell phone, and receives the urgent communication from Michael (she is to call him back, any time, even in the middle of the night) that precipitates the entire action. Michael is her 'best friend', with whom she once had a brief romantic fling; when they broke it off they swore to marry each other if they hadn't found a partner by the age of twenty-eight. Both will be twenty-eight within weeks; it is George who initially puts into her head the notion that a wedding with her 'best friend' is on the horizon.

The film plays throughout on the 'best friend' motif. When Kimmy (Diaz) asks Julianne to be her maid of honour, she adds 'This means I have four days to make you my best friend' (Julianne has the same four days to break up the wedding). At the ballpark, when Michael first begins to see Julianne in a new light, he asks her 'What did you do with my best friend?' At the tailor's, when Michael is being fitted for his suit, Julianne introduces George as '...my good friend...my *best* friend these days'. George has already replaced Michael as Julianne's best friend; at the film's extraordinary conclusion he will also replace him as Julianne's groom, the wedding of Michael and Kimmy becoming also that of George and Julianne, giving the film's title a final twist.

The nature of the relationship between Julianne and George is gradually defined through their scenes together: a mutual dependency that is neither romantic nor sexual, hence free of the demands, restrictions and jealousies of 'traditional' love relationships. If an overtone of male domi-

George (Rupert Everett) understandably stunned by the congratulations of the man his hypothetical bride intends to marry.



nance remains, it is one that Julianne can reject whenever she wishes: professionally he is her editor (though neither the film nor the character makes anything of that), personally her wise advisor, not so much because, as a man, he knows better, but because, as a *gay* man, he can view from the outside the social conventions and behaviour-patterns from which Julianne has never quite emancipated herself. His concern for her (because he senses that she is going to behave badly, in ways of which she will be ashamed) never expresses itself as even remotely bullying or dictatorial, and it is always balanced by his fear of losing her: Michael's instant jealousy when he believes Julianne and George are lovers is balanced by George's sense of loss when he believes she will be absorbed in a traditional marriage. If he is her 'best friend', it is clear that she is also his; if this is not what one normally thinks of as a 'love' relationship, perhaps our definition of love needs rethinking.

The film takes over from *Muriel's Wedding* the use of a song associated with the heroine and becoming a marker of her development, but it develops this device far more elaborately and satisfyingly. There are, in fact, *two* songs involved, one associated with Julianne's relationship with Michael, the other connected to her relationship with George. 'Just the way you look tonight', is introduced in the sequence of Julianne's first serious (and almost successful) attempt to break up Michael's relationship with Kimmy—the restaurant scene where Kimmy, at Julianne's instigation, asks Michael to work for her father in an office job for six months, enabling *her* to fulfil certain life-choices (finishing college, beginning her own career in architecture) instead of sacrificing everything for *him*: he arrives for lunch singing it to Julianne, as a memory of their romantic fling. He sings it to her again on the sightseeing launch and they dance together, publicly, yet seemingly completely unaware of the presence of outsiders. He has by this time admitted that he felt 'crazy jealous' of George, and his revived attraction to Julianne has become very evident; it's the moment that convinces her of her *right* to break up the marriage, which can't possibly be a happy one, the couple being hopelessly incompatible and Michael still being romantically attached to *her*, releasing her from her last promptings of conscience or consideration for others, enabling her meanest and most reprehensible action. George's song, introduced at the eve-of-wedding luncheon, is Burt Bacharach's 'I say a little prayer for you': 'Forever, and ever, you stay in my heart/...For ever, and ever, we never will part'. George introduces it in relation to his account (hilarious, and totally fictitious) of his first meeting with Julianne, and it is immediately taken up, first by the two bridesmaids, then by the entire assembly: it's important that it becomes a public song, symbolically uniting the supposed couple with an outside world, while the Michael/Julianne song is strictly personal and hermetic, shutting the world out.

In the final scenes the two songs are juxtaposed, representing the choice that Julianne must make. In her obligatory 'maid of honour' speech at the wedding reception, Julianne publicly acknowledges the ugly and psychopathic nature of her behaviour, then confers the song she shared with Michael upon the new couple, as her wedding gift, 'until you find your own song'. It is her way of relinquishing her obsession, and with it the past. After the couple leave for the honeymoon, the reception continues. Julianne is alone

among the crowd. Her cell-phone rings: George of course. But George is there, at another table, and he presents her with what is effectively *his* wedding gift to her: 'I say a little prayer...' We are then given an entirely new variation on an old convention (a convention that will be repeated, shopworn and totally unconvincing, in its original form, at the end of Roberts' subsequent *Notting Hill*): the public proposal. George advances towards her across the floor, making it clear that what he is offering is a permanent relationship: 'And though you quite correctly sense that he is—gay, like most devastatingly handsome single men of his age... There won't be marriage. There won't be sex. But, by God, there'll be dancing.' Earlier in the film Michael had protested to her at the ballpark (her dancing with the best man at the reception being in question) that 'You can't dance. When did you learn how to dance?' Their dance together on the launch was slow, tentative, private; her dance with George is abandoned and ecstatic, a dance of liberation. The film closes on 'Together, forever...' The film thus fulfils the traditional Hollywood obligation to progress toward the 'construction of the couple', but it is no longer the 'construction of the *heterosexual* couple'.

As with *The Daytrippers*, it is a simple matter to relate *My Best Friend's Wedding* to classic screwball: indeed, it directly evokes *Bringing up Baby*, which was also about a woman determined at all costs to prevent a man from marrying his fiancée within a short period of time. In the 30s, Katharine Hepburn would have played the Julia Roberts role and the ending would have been a foregone conclusion: the prospective bride would have been revealed as either an idiot bimbo or a calculating bitch, hence jettisoned without the least discomfort for either the other characters or for the audience, the groom would have realized his terrible mistake, Hepburn would have replaced the bride at the altar in a breathless last-minute upheaval, and the wedding would have formed a triumphant conclusion. That is precisely how I 'knew' the film would end the first time I saw it, though I was increasingly disturbed by the question of how it would manage to jettison Cameron Diaz without doing itself irreparable damage: her character was simply too sweet, too lovable, too vulnerable, too sincerely in love. Another source of disturbance was that the Cary Grant role seemed somehow to have become split between Dermot Mulroney and Rupert Everett.

Gays in 90s comedy: problem or solution?

What above all distinguishes *My Best Friend's Wedding* from classic screwball is something that couldn't have happened in any mainstream film prior to the 60s, and didn't in fact happen prior to the 80s: the inclusion of a character who is not only openly gay but is represented positively and attractively. Rupert Everett's George is very different from the grotesques and lost souls who first represented gays when the taboo on explicit gay representation was lifted in the 60s (*Boys in the Band*, *Staircase*, *The Killing of Sister George*...): in every aspect but the sexual he is an ideal partner for her. Recent films are beginning to suggest that the Right Wing dread of the 'gay lifestyle' is not without foundation: what is feared is not merely that, were gayness viewed positively, virtually everyone would immediately become homosexual, but rather that gay relationships might become a model for a new, freer, alternative 'normality'. It is not, when you think

about it, in the least surprising that the collapse of confidence in the traditional norms would be accompanied by the sudden emergence of images of attractive gay men leading apparently happy and productive lives. The apparently open arms with which gays have suddenly been welcomed in recent Hollywood cinema have not yet opened indiscriminately: gays have been mainly restricted to comedy, where there is less need to show sexual acts or even expressions of love. The gay love story is a genre so far restricted to small films aimed at gay audiences (*Making Love* was generally ridiculed by gays on its appearance, but its audacity seems now proven by the fact that it has still, twenty years later, had no sequel). Hollywood is still rather wary of gay couples, though they are beginning to appear in some surprising places (*Big Daddy*, *Go*). The most radical use of gay characters is once again in *The Daytrippers*, where the final breakdown of the marriage and the dissolution of the family coincides with—is indeed precipitated by—the discovery not only that the husband *has* indeed been unfaithful, but with another man: on the symbolic level, the co-occurrence of the collapse of norms with the production of a gay relationship is eloquent.

A favourite (and logical) role for gays in the new Hollywood comedy was quickly discovered: make the gay character the heroine's best friend (*The Object of My Affection*, *Blast from the Past*) and the problems are solved, the potential embarrassment of the more repressed and inhibited members of the audience averted. *My Best Friend's Wedding* seizes on this and brilliantly turns its limitations to advantage: the film's use of the Everett character is exemplary in its intelligence. George's maturity, considerateness, tact, are intimately connected to the gayness that sets him apart from the social norms, permitting him a wise distance from the practices and conventions in which those around him are entangled. He is able to talk to Jules in a way that would be impossible for a heterosexual man, offering her always an intimacy that is the closer for being non-sexual. Hence the film's remarkable culmination, its 'happy end' which becomes the securer alternative to the marital union which Jules has renounced, in its way an alternative 'marriage': George's public speech to her, at the wedding reception for her 'best friend' and the woman of his choice, constitutes a veritable proposal, the commitment to a relationship that will be permanent but non-exclusive, built upon much sounder foundations than romantic love or sexual attraction. As a friend of mine once wisely said to me, 'You should live with friends, not with lovers'. The film leaves us with the question of which man *is* now her best friend, and whose wedding is this anyway?

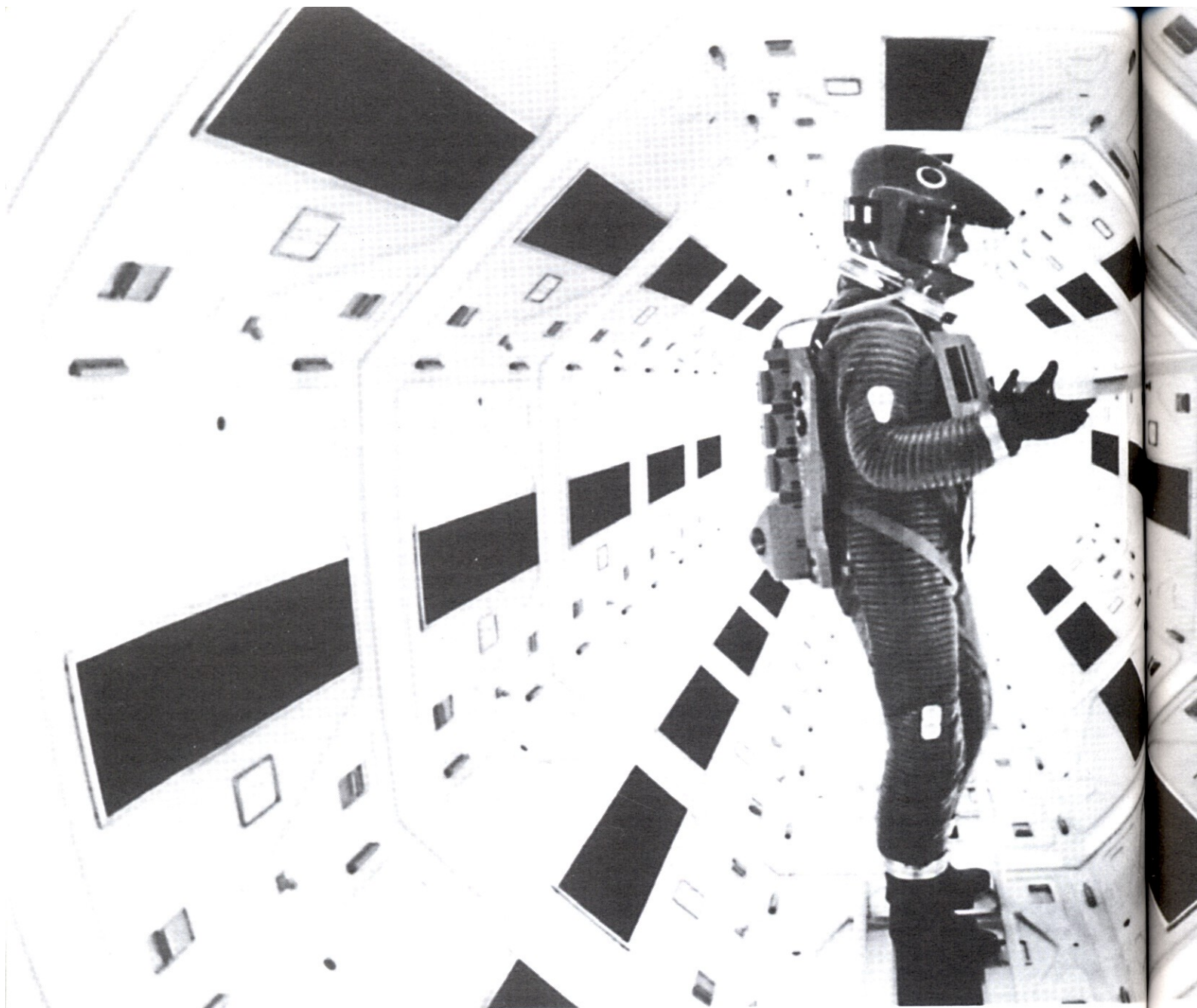
The implications of all this are far-reaching. I omitted, in my rough list of what, in gay life, the Hollywood cinema continues to suppress or skirt rather uneasily around: the question of sexual freedom. This is why *My Best Friend's Wedding* can tell us little or nothing about George's sex life. There is one brief scene which may offer a clue, the scene where Julianne, desperate, calls up in the middle of George's dinner party to beg him to come to her aid. George is at the head of the table, as host; to his left and right and two presumably straight couples; at the other end (where traditionally the wife would sit) is a bald-headed man, briefly glimpsed: are we to take him as George's lover?—as another friend? There is no clue other than his position at the formal table. The Right talks of 'the gay lifestyle', but in fact gay life comprehends

many distinct lifestyles. There is reason to believe that the original model for gay couples, imitated from the only obvious available model and imitating traditional marriage—ostensible monogamy, with 'cheating' (horrible word, horrible concept!) on the side, with the resulting rows, growing tension, and constant suspicions—is gradually dying out. More gay couples are accepting the natural polygamy of (most?) human beings and ceasing to regard sexual behaviour outside the relationship as 'infidelity' (another horrible word, as commonly used) since the couple remain, essentially, faithful to each other. But to 'live with friends, not with lovers' would remove any lingering residues of the past, the jealousies, tensions and quarrels. The very notion of 'the couple' need no longer have the status it still retains: why not three, or four, or more, and what would it matter if the relationships were sexual or not? It would not of course be necessary to share the same living space (there is no suggestion in the film that Julianne and George will live together).

And what would be the consequences if such practices spread to the heterosexual world?

Surely, for many, the release from all the strains of traditional marriage-and-family would entail, above all, a vast sigh of relief? Freedom of choice: you could, if that was what you wanted, have sex with only one person for the rest of your life (so long as you didn't insist that he/she do the same) or with a hundred thousand. You would still, if you wished, and if you found the right person(s), have permanent or semi-permanent relationships, and they would be built upon the very strong bonds of common interests and compatibility, not on the quicksands of sexual desire and 'romantic love', both of which seem to fade rather quickly. How many couples, gay or straight, do *you* know who still have passionate sex (rather than sex-as-duty or sex-as-routine) after ten years of living together?

All that remains is the question of children: how they would be conceived and born, how they would be raised. And, really, all that needs to be discarded is our culture's obsession with biological parentage, which is merely a form of possessiveness and pride (one of the seven deadly sins!). Our entire culture conspires to suggest to children, almost from birth, that it is a matter of enormous and far-reaching importance who are their fathers and mothers. Yet, within our civilization, by far the largest portion of neurosis (with its concomitants of inhibition, repression, anxiety, generally stunted potential, and in the more extreme cases far more disastrous results) develops within the traditional family, passed on from generation to generation. Speaking personally, I certainly include myself in this, but I also include virtually everyone else with whom I have come into close contact throughout my life. The damage is irreparable: *Why* do we want it to continue? There would be no problem in producing and raising children within the various possible versions of social organization I have outlined: surely, today, we can dispense with antiquated notions about 'bastards' and 'children born out of wedlock'?. A child should be free to relate, on a primary basis, to people other than her/his biological parents; should, in fact, have a similar freedom of choice to that of adults. And sex would fulfil its evolutionary trajectory, its growth through the millennia from mere reproductive agency to its ultimate destiny: the sharing of pleasure, affection and intimacy among human beings.



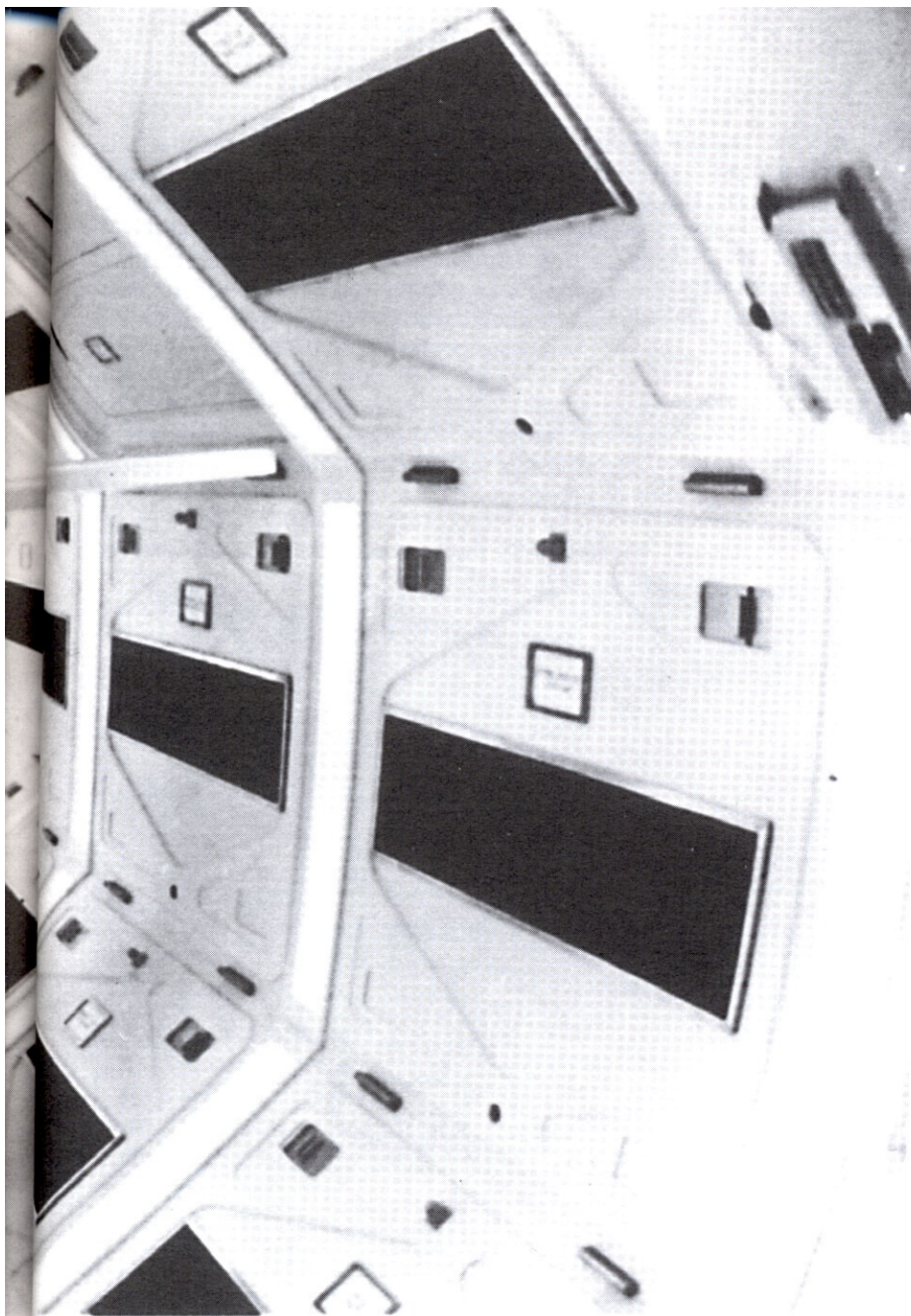
2001 REVISITED

by Peter E.S. Babiak

During my early adolescence I considered Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) to represent Hollywood cinema's supreme achievement. The fact that my enthusiasm for the film was shared by many others was demonstrated by theatres that were packed whenever the film was re-released, which was at least once a year from 1975 to 1982. The film was widely recognized as a standard against which other science fiction films were compared (I distinctly remember that one newspaper, in 1977, preceded its initial review of *Star Wars*, with the headline "They're both masterpieces, but *Star Wars* is more fun than *2001*").

The following reviews attest that *2001: A Space Odyssey* was also one of the more controversial films of its time:

I think Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* is some sort of great film, and an unforgettable endeavour. Technically and imaginatively, what he put into it is staggering: five years of his life; his novel and screenplay, with Arthur C. Clarke; his production, his direction, his special effects; his humour and stamina and particular disquiet. The film is not only hideously funny—like *Dr. Strangelove*—about human speech and response



at a point where they have begun to seem computerized, and where more and more people sound like recordings left on while the soul is out. It is also a uniquely poetic piece of sci-fi, made by a man who truly possesses the drives of both science and fiction. (Gilliatt, Penelope. "After Man". *The New Yorker Magazine*, Inc. 1968: N. pag. qtd. in Agel 209)

Whenever the thunder of critical controversy rips through the air, one thing is certain: Lightning has struck. Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* is just such a jolt of brilliant, high-voltage cinema ... Like any sudden flash accompanied by a loud noise, the film is both startling and illuminating. If it has temporarily left viewers more dazed and curious than enlightened, this is perhaps intentional. The evocation of wonder and awe is perhaps the primary aim of the film ... Whether one wonders what the black metallic monoliths are or what the surrealistic end

of the film is supposed to mean or what the opening prehistoric sequence signifies—or simply what the film world is coming to—is temporarily beside the point. What matters is that the imagination and the intellect are jolted out of complacency by the experience of seeing the film. Wonder, like laughter or tears, is a legitimate emotional response. (Allen, John. Rev. of *2001: A Space Odyssey*. *The Christian Science Monitor*. 1968: N. pag. qtd. in Agel 229)

It is morally pretentious, intellectually obscure, and inordinately long. The concluding statement is too private, too profound, or perhaps too shallow for immediate comprehension. (Schlesinger Jr., Arthur, Rev. of *2001: A Space Odyssey*. *Vogue*. 1968: N. pag. qtd. in Agel 246)

2001 is not the worst film I've ever seen. It's simply the duller. (Dibble, Peter Davis. Rev. of *2001: A Space Odyssey*. *Women's Wear Daily*. 1968: N. pag. qtd. in Agel 246)

For a film that had generated so much controversy in the time of its initial release, *2001: A Space Odyssey* generates little discussion among critics and academics today. For critics who try to read the film through post-modern theory, the film might seem simplistic and dull. Although the film reflects the realities of the Cold War, its politics are obvious and undeveloped. The film is also indefinite in terms of the racial/gender stereotypes that it portrays—although all of its characters are caucasian, and in some sequences it seems to preserve the pilot/stewardess hierarchy of a late 1960's airline—Floyd/William Sylvester

is presented as treating his female Russian friend as a colleague and an equal. Although recognizably powerful corporate entities are presented in the film (Floyd is transported to the space station on a Pan-American flight, uses a Bell telephone terminal once in the space station, and has a quick drink at the space station's Howard Johnson's franchise) there is no attempt in the film to take a position on their function within current or future societies.

I had personally come to characterize *2001: A Space Odyssey* as a highly superficial film that had been a fad of my adolescence. However, after viewing *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999) I began to perceive Kubrick as a mainstream director strongly influenced by many elements of the European Modernist tradition, particularly psychoanalysis and surrealism. Of *Eyes Wide Shut*, Richard Schikel writes, in a July 1999, *Time* magazine review:

...eros and thanatos are exquisitely mixed. The dead body

of the first woman's father is clearly visible as she confesses her confused passion; the prostitute turns out to be under the threat of AIDS; the orgiasts, resenting William's intrusion on their saturnalia, threaten him with humiliation and death, and he is "redeemed" only by the intervention of a mysterious woman, who pays for his life with her own. (37)

Other works of Kubrick's are equally influenced by the European Modernist tradition, in fact, the Eros/Thanatos pairings that Schikel noticed in *Eyes Wide Shut* represent a recurring motif in Kubrick's work. In *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) Dorian Harewood's character solicits a prostitute, and later endures

the film's most excruciating death. *The Shining* (1980) depicts the wraith of a beautiful nude woman emerging from a bathtub to embrace Jack Nicholson's character, transforming into a rotting corpse as they kiss. *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) shows Alex murdering the "cat-woman" with a huge plaster phallus, and *Dr. Strangelove* (1964) has Slim Pickens destroying humanity astride a nuclear phallic symbol.

In the 1924 Manifesto, Andre Breton defines surrealism as:

Surrealism, n. Masc. Psychic automatism in its pure state by which one proposes to express—verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner—the actual functioning of thought. (101)

Bowman (Kier Dullea) and Poole (Gary Lockwood) with HAL.



(Psychic automatism is defined by Robert Short as an attempt "... to identify the source and mechanism of irrational images. Psychic automatism was understood to express the voice of the mind freed from the conventions and limitations of conscious expression." [66]) Kubrick's stated agenda, in producing *2001: A Space Odyssey*, greatly recalls the surrealist attempt to speak to the unconscious mind of the audience:

I don't like to talk about *2001* much because it's essentially a nonverbal experience... It attempts to communicate more to the subconscious and to the feelings than it does to the intellect. (qtd. in Agel 7)

2001: A Space Odyssey presents us with images that—although naturalistic within the diegesis of the film—are visually aligned with surrealist imagery. The monolith, when it first appears, is utterly incongruous in its perfect symmetry in the pliocene landscape. John Hofess has noted that the arrival of the shuttle at the space station recalls Leger's *Ballet Mechanique* (Rev. of *2001: A Space Odyssey. Take One*. 1968: N. pag. qtd. in Agel 235). Audiences are always amused by watching the waitress walking up the wall and along the ceiling of the lunar landing craft, which seems to take on the appearance of a skull as it approaches the moon. One striking image depicts Bowman/Keir Dullea standing on the floor of Discovery's flight deck, while Poole/Gary Lockwood stands on what we would normally consider to be the wall. Although these images are consistent with the film's underlying premises of alien contact and zero gravity, they are nonetheless visually aligned with Dali's melting clocks.

2001: A Space Odyssey also reflects Kubrick's preoccupation with the juxtaposition of eros and thanatos, most notably in the Jupiter mission segment. The image of Poole jogging in the centrifuge among the electronic sarcophagi of the hibernating astronauts juxtaposes an image of health and vitality against one of death. Bowman's creative impulse to draw would normally be associated with eros, however the subjects of his drawings again are the hibernating astronauts. Conceptually, hibernation itself presents such a juxtaposition—although described as an attempt to preserve the ship's life support resources by imposing artificial sleep upon the astronauts, the astronauts do not dream while in hibernation, and therefore no longer function as sentient beings. Bowman's attempt to save Poole using exactly the method that Hal had used to murder Poole (clutching him in the arms of the space pod) presents another juxtaposition.

Eros and thanatos are not understood as limited to sex and death, respectively. Rather, eros is considered an innate drive that compels us to act toward the survival of the species, whereas thanatos is thought to be an innate drive that compels us to act toward the destruction of the species. *2001: A Space Odyssey* juxtaposes these drives in order to demonstrate one of the paradoxes of human existence. In *Cineaction*, issue 46, Garry Watson states "Group solidarity is always based on various kinds of exclusion or opposition". (9) Whenever an "in-group" is defined, by its very nature it also defines an "out-group". By the very nature of our psyches, we are torn between the urge to affiliate, to form social bonds, to form interpersonal relationships, to mate, etc., and the urge to alienate, exclude, or destroy persons, groups, or other species whose agendas or needs do not coincide with our own.

This conflict is presented as an innate characteristic of humankind from the film's onset. The apes depicted in "The Dawn of Man" have already achieved a state of in-group affiliation versus out-group alienation. We see scenes depicting the "protagonist" apes shoving tapirs away while foraging for grass and roots, shrieking at another group of apes that they compete with for water, and huddling together at night for mutual protection and comfort. However, their survival strategies and attempts to consolidate their efforts are ineffectual. The bones strewn all over the landscape indicate that the threat of death is ever present. The tapirs are barely bothered by the apes' attempt to stop them from competing for the same food source. The leopard attacks one of the apes with no fear of recourse, and the shrieking session around the water-hole resolves nothing.

The monolith gives the privileged group of apes the ability to use tools—a skill which allows the apes to realize their natural inclinations towards affiliation and alienation into effective courses of action—in this case allowing them to become predatory and capable of murder. Kubrick here is providing us with a perverse rendering of the Genesis myth—here it is not the fall of humankind that is precipitated by the first murder—it is the ascent.

The famous "four-million year jump-cut" demonstrates that through the effective use of technology, humankind is capable not only of survival, but is capable of success in the most incredibly hostile environments. The three sequences that move to the second encounter with the monolith (those depicting the trip from the earth to the space station, from the space station to Clavius base, and from Clavius base to the monolith) share a great emphasis placed on the technical readouts of the pilots display screens as the spacecraft approach their destinations—reinforcing our sense that human existence in these contexts is contingent on our ability to utilize technology effectively. What is sacrificed here is that humans must surrender much of their awareness and experience of their actual surroundings in order to monitor the equipment they depend upon for their very survival.

When Floyd first arrives at the space station we find humankind plagued with the same issues that plagued humankind in the Pliocene era. There has been much misinterpretation of the scene depicting Floyd's telephone call to his child, which illustrates the affiliation/alienation conflict on many levels. Technology here simultaneously alienates Floyd from his daughter (he is physically removed by several thousand miles from her) but allows him to maintain his relationship with her by telephone (satisfying the emotional requirements of the father-daughter relationship, yet failing to satisfy the tactile requirement of the relationship). Floyd is also forced to rush off the phone and to disrupt his affectionate exchange with his daughter with instructions that are to be relayed to his wife, in order that he might fulfill what later turns out to be a corporate agenda.

Although many critics believe that Kubrick depicts humankind in the year 2001 as devoid of emotion, my impression of Floyd's behavior is one of warmth confused and made problematic by the issues discussed here. When Floyd joins the other scientists for a drink on the space station, his manner is charming and friendly until he is "put on the spot" by Smyslov. His manner then becomes cold and calculated, while his speech becomes very deliberate. His

warmth and charm return, however, when he excuses himself in order to resume his journey. His manner changes only when the group agenda is threatened. Once the group agenda is preserved, Floyd's manner again becomes conciliatory.

The scene in the boardroom on Clavius base depicts this further. Floyd receives a warm welcome and is warm in turn, confessing empathy with the others in the boardroom for the anxiety that the false rumor of the epidemic must be causing. Floyd's speech is very familiar here—he refers to someone as “Bill” rather than William. However, when Floyd begins to articulate the “need for absolute secrecy” to the group, his tone becomes firm, and he is depicted in the frame with the American flag immediately behind him. He again has shifted from the personal agenda to affiliate to the corporate agenda to alienate, and oscillates between speaking with the personal voice and with the corporate voice.

The early scenes of the “Jupiter Mission” segment expand upon thematic concerns regarding humankind's use of technology raised in “The Dawn of Man” segment. Humankind is now so expert in utilizing tools to negotiate hostile environments that we see two astronauts who are undertaking the greatest and most dangerous mission in humankind's history and yet are utterly bored by it. Life on board the spaceship *Discovery* is depicted as completely routine. We first see Poole jogging in an endless cycle in the ship's centrifuge—expending effort yet getting nowhere. Bowman and Poole sit together over dinner and watch the evening news without communicating with each other in what must surely be a parody of middle class existence. Poole's boredom is so extreme that—despite the fact that he is physically separated from him family by millions of miles—he responds to their birthday greeting lethargically.

Hal is introduced to us as a “member of *Discovery's* crew”, further representing the extent to which human endeavor and technological devices have become intertwined. We are also told that Hal can “...reproduce ... most of the activities of the human brain, and with incalculably greater speed and reliability”. Later events prove that this is indeed the case. John Allen writes:

As Hitler was a false human version of the superman, so the HAL 9000 computer becomes an equally destructive mechanical version of the superman. The reason for this destructiveness is that the machine appears, in fact, altogether too human. It is presented as capable of pride, envy, rivalry, fear, murder, and the false notion that a scientific mission is more important than life. In short, it is insane, and its insanity threatens to destroy life ... Its insanity, of course, is no greater than that of any fallible mortal who assumes fallible mortals can create, out of their own cleverness, an infallible machine. (Rev. of 2001: *A Space Odyssey*. *The Christian Science Monitor*. 1968: N. pag. qtd. in Agel 232-233)

Hal is initially presented as an accepted member of the crew whose participation is a normal fact of shipboard life. Bowman and Poole form a new affiliation with one another, and consequently alienate Hal, when they step into the space pod and, believing Hal cannot hear them, conspire to disconnect Hal. Their former, professional, polite tones are now urgent and concerned, just as Floyd's manner had changed

when his agenda was threatened. Hal, in reading their lips and formulating his own plan, is really only reproducing their behavior. They have misrepresented themselves in order to conspire against him and he now misrepresents himself to plot their murders.

Hal commits murder “with incalculably greater speed and reliability” than his human counterparts. The first depictions of violence and murder seen in the film are portrayed as frantic and out of control. As the ape learns to use the bone as a weapon he flails his arms about, smashing bones so hard that they scatter all around him, and finally loses control to the extent that he just throws the bones around. The killing of the tapir is a messy business involving passing the animals meat to all members of the group. The first murder depicted again displays a tendency to over-kill, as the privileged apes thump the corpse of their victim with a club long after their victim is obviously subdued.

Hal's first murder again is very clumsy—he attacks Poole with one of the space pods. As a suffocating Poole struggles to reconnect his oxygen supply, his arms flail about in a manner that recalls the flailing of the apes' arms. Hal's next three murders, however, are much more efficient in their execution. Not undertaking any violent course of action, Hal simply stops providing life support to the hibernating astronauts. His plan to murder Bowman is even more flawlessly efficient. Bowman has already left the ship without his helmet in order to rescue Poole. In order to murder Bowman, Hal simply has to do nothing when Bowman requests that he be let back on board *Discovery*.

John Hofsess writes:

Kubrick makes it clear, however, that astronaut Bowman alone displays any sign of non-cognitive skills; his sketches (of hibernating humans) are the only evidence of artistic wonder and curiosity, and represent one of the few activities and uses of the mind that HAL is not programmed to emulate. To Bowman is given the task of dismantling Hal. (Rev. of 2001: *A Space Odyssey*. *Take One*. 1968: N. pag. qtd. in Agel 235)

By employing his creative, rather than his logical, processes Bowman arrives at method of entering the airlock through use of the characteristics of the space pod and of the airlock in a manner other than which they were designed for. Paradoxically, because of his greater capacity for imagination, Bowman is obviously greatly upset by Hal's pleas for his life, and feels empathy and remorse for Hal. As Bowman is also possessed of the affiliation/alienation conflict, he is capable of simultaneously feeling empathy for Hal while destroying Hal.

The tendency toward interpreting the film's final segment (“Jupiter and Beyond the Infinite”) as representative of Bowman being sent on a trans-galactic journey to another solar system has probably stemmed from a tendency to use Arthur C. Clarke's novel as a key to the interpretation of Stanley Kubrick's film. Clarke's novel is based on an early draft of Kubrick's screenplay, which Kubrick later modified in the extreme, therefore novel and the film should be viewed as separate entities with separate intentions. The psychedelic light show certainly does seem to support being interpreted as depicting a journey through several alien solar systems to an ultimate encounter with a greater intelligence beyond the

stars. However, Kubrick jettisoned all narration in the film that would have determined the audience's reading of the film. Many of the landscapes that we seem to rocket over are identifiably terrestrial landscapes—only the color balance of the film, and subsequently our way of perceiving them, seems to have changed. There is also an emphasis on Bowman's flickering eye that recalls Bunuel's use of the woman's eye at the beginning of *Un Chien Andalou*. This suggests that Kubrick might be using the incredible light show as Bunuel uses the slicing of the eyeball—to shock the audience into a frame of mind where they will be receptive to ideas that they previously might not have been.

The final scene in the hotel room seems blatantly surrealist in its intent. We see the incongruous images of the astronaut and the space pod in an ornate, archaic, Louis XVI hotel room, and we hear weird electronic shrieks on the soundtrack as Bowman explores the hotel room. Critics who use the novel as a key to interpreting this scene have concluded that it represents Bowman spending a period of decades in this hotel room, aging and eventually dying under alien observation, to be reborn to a higher plane of evolution.

This interpretation, however, ignores the manner in which this scene is edited. We actually seem to be observing Bowman at four stages of his life, observing himself at other stages of his life. We first see Bowman, trembling in his space pod, and are then given a covering shot of the pod in the hotel room. We then see, from Bowman's point of view in the pod, an older Bowman exploring the living room and bathroom. This second Bowman approaches then emerges from the bathroom into the dining room. We then see, from this second Bowman's point of view, a third Bowman—much older—in the dining room. This third Bowman hears noise from the bathroom, investigates, finds nothing, and resumes dining. He knocks his wineglass off of the dining room table. The glass shatters loudly on the floor, and the third Bowman leans over to pick up the wineglass. The third Bowman then sees the a fourth Bowman, who is obviously on his deathbed. The fourth Bowman then sees the monolith, which is situated in the position previously occupied by the third Bowman. Kubrick presents this scene according to the Freudian notion that time has no meaning in dreams, and according to the surrealist tendency to emphasize the manifest content of dreams over the latent content of dreams.

The final image of Bowman transformed into an embryo that travels the stars redresses thematic concerns opened in "The Dawn of Man". The embryo travels the stars without technological intervention, as a result of a second encounter with the entity that first introduced technology to humankind. Has humankind superceded the need to utilize technological means in order to survive the environment or, has humankind become indistinguishable from its technological artifacts? Has humankind resolved the affiliation/alienation conflict to the effect that we are now all capable of negotiating the universe without technological intervention or is Bowman humankind's only representative in this higher realm of being, highly evolved yet completely alienated? The working title of *2001: A Space Odyssey* was "Journey Beyond the Stars". In classical literature, The Odyssey tells of Ulysses' extreme adventure in returning home. Has Bowman in some way returned home at the film's conclusion, completing and renewing a cycle? According to Kubrick, the

number of answers to these questions should coincide with the number of people who have seen the film.

...2001: *A Space Odyssey* cannot be easily judged if only because of its dazzling technical perfection. To be able to see beyond that may take a few years. When we have grown used to beautiful strange machines, and the wonder of Kubrick's special effects wears off by duplication in other Hollywood films, then we can probe confidently beyond 2001's initial fascination and decide what kind of a film it really is. (Hunter, et al. Rev. of *2001: A Space Odyssey*. *The Harvard Crimson*. 1968: N. pag. qtd. in Agel 222)

Although nominally a mainstream science-fiction film, *2001: A Space Odyssey* is extremely tenuous in its adherence to conventional narrative structures. Richard Lippe has suggested (in an unpublished discussion) that throughout the course of his career Kubrick employs a variety of generic forms in order to explore narrative forms and thematic elements that interest him. For example, *Paths of Glory* is presented in the generic form of the war film, but in terms of its narrative is far more concerned with a critique of the operation of corporate power within the French military hierarchy than it is with a presentation of battle with the Germans. (This critique recalls Renoir's deconstruction of nationalism in *Grand Illusion* [1938]). *2001: A Space Odyssey* represents one of Kubrick's most effective utilizations of a mainstream generic form to express narrative forms and thematic elements usually associated with the European avante-garde. This provides ample opportunity for further study to determine the extent to which the influence of the avante-garde is evident in the larger body of Kubrick's work.

For Nancy Kimoff with thanks to Gerald Grant and Rob Potwin.

Peter E.S. Babiak has taken a hiatus from academia for the last 3 years. During this time Peter has produced some very good work, and some work that is best consumed with an open mind and a good sense of humour...

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THE CINEMA OF THE DISPERSED YUGOSLAVS

Diasporas in the making

by Dina Iordanova

Director Srdjan Dragojevic, of the acclaimed *Pretty Village*, *Pretty Flame* (1996) and *Wounds* (1998), was expected to leave Yugoslavia for America half a year before the Kosovo crisis. In the fall of 1998 he had announced a three-picture deal with Miramax, and everyone knew he was bound to the West. It so happened, however, that he left Belgrade just days before the bombing started. By the time he reached New York, America had launched a war on his native country.

At a press conference, Dragojevic refused to condemn the Serbian government, choosing instead to appeal to journalists to see the multiple dimensions of the tragedy that was to unravel, and to point out that things were not as simple and straightforward as many would prefer them to be.

While Dragojevic was talking to the press in New York, his film colleagues back in Belgrade firmly believed that he had never reached the US and was, in fact, stuck in Budapest with his family, his chances to ever be granted an American entry visa steadily decreasing. It seems that the obscurity about Dragojevic's whereabouts was being maintained with his consent.

It is not so difficult to see why: While going to the US was the right career move for Dragojevic, there was no need to manifest it publicly to those who stayed back in Belgrade to take "the punishment" of bombing. It was an awkward situation: He was certainly one disapproving of the regime, but so were many others who stayed behind and who were now charged with collective guilt.

Not only Dragojevic's political allegiances are split in such a way. To various degrees, this attitude is characteristic of many of the film people who left Yugoslavia around the time of this country's break-up. Many of them lead an existence, which can be described as "sitting on the fence," neither here nor there, expected to take sides but unwilling to do so.

In her book about life after emigration, Croatian author Dubravka Ugresic speaks of getting together with other displaced Yugoslav intellectuals in a New York flat—here they are, together, the same people once again, only in a different locale. One of them, the film director, says: "I don't want to stay, I don't want to go back, what can I do?"¹

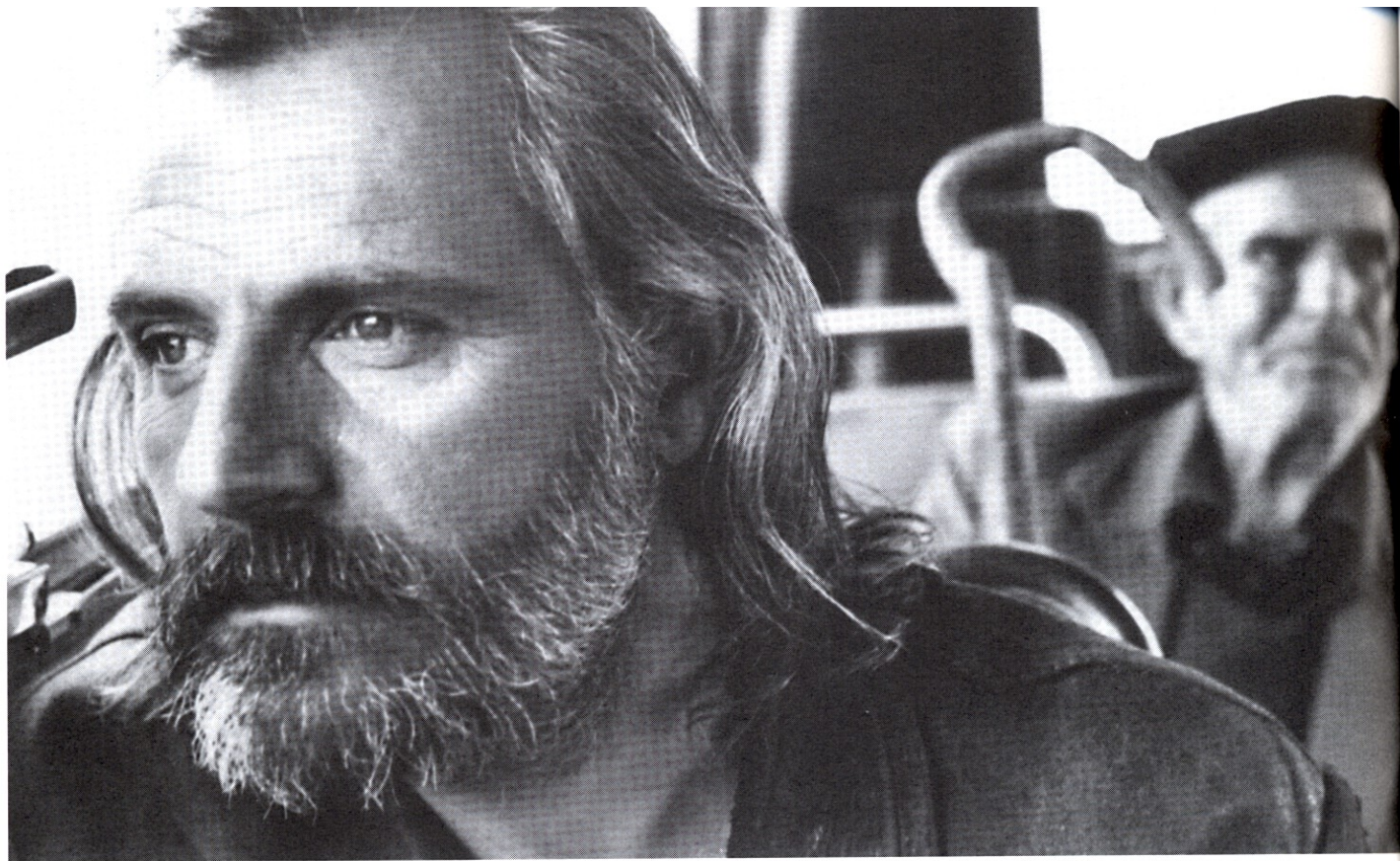
These people are not typical exiles. Only a handful of them are in an outspoken opposition to the regime. They can move back and forth freely between their home country and the West. Unlike exiles, they are often celebrated at home rather than perceived as subversive dissidents. It is the topic of their troubled homeland that concerns them all, as well as the themes of migrations and dispersal. They are all part of a new diaspora-in-the making.

DIRECTORS AS INTERPRETERS

Most of the Yugoslav directors who enjoy an international profile have been commuting between America and Europe during the past decade. With a few exceptions, they prefer to move either in the world of US independents or within the European realm rather than plunge into mainstream Hollywood. Even though their films are marked by differences in language and location, they all subscribe, to a greater or lesser extent, to the same project of a critical rethinking of the Balkan space. They have all undergone the necessary experiences of displacement and detachment from their own country, have overcome an ingrained complex of Balkan inferiority, and have launched a sound critical examination of the crisis back home.

1. Ugresic, Dubravka, *Have a Nice Day: From the Balkan War to the American Dream*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1994, p.69. Translated by Celia Hawkesworth.





Rade Serbedzija in *Before the Rain*.

The directors of international stature—Goran Paskaljevic, Emir Kusturica, and Milcho Manchevski—have all expressed a desire to work on projects that would not confine them to the peculiar Balkan universe. At the same time, however, they seem to feel compelled to continue making films that present their vision of what the Balkan conflict is all about. In making such films, they accept functioning as cross-cultural interpreters of their troubled home to worldwide audiences.

Serbian Goran Paskaljevic lives in Paris. His *Someone Else's America* (1995) is set in New York and in Texas, and was produced with French, British, German and Greek involvement. It tells the story of Montenegrin, Basque, and Chinese immigrants. Today, Paskaljevic is involved in a new international project, which is shooting on location in Mexico and will have almost nothing to do with his native Yugoslavia. In-between, however, he made a Belgrade-set film, *Powder Keg* a.k.a. *Cabaret Balkan* (1998), which was meant to explain to the international audiences the insanity and bleakness of Milosevic's Belgrade.

Sarajevo-born Emir Kusturica, the one with the highest international profile, migrated to America in 1990. His 1993 *Arizona Dream* was set in the Southern US and dealt only with Americans. He since returned to Europe and at the moment is working on a Holocaust-themed drama based on D.M. Thomas's *The White Hotel*. In between, Kusturica made the Yugoslavia-themed but internationally financed Cannes-winner *Underground* (1995) and *Black Cat, White Cat* (1998), a story of Serbian Gypsies living on the Danube's shores.²

Macedonian Milcho Manchevski studied and worked in America before making the European-funded tale of Balkan inter-ethnic tensions *Before the Rain* (1994). He is now working on his next auteurist project, which will be set in Macedonia around the turn of the century, and in present-day New York. In between, however, he spent time working on the set of Miramax's American Civil war cannibalism story *Ravenous*, a

project that he quit in 1997 over creative differences.³

Other former Yugoslavs based in the West continue making movies about the ordeals of the Yugoslav break-up, if given the chance. In the US, Serbian Predrag Antonijevic made *Savior* (1998), an Oliver Stone-produced story of a Western mercenary involved in the Bosnian war. Croatian Lordan Zafranovic, director of the seminal *Occupation in 26 Scenes* (1976), moved to Prague and made *The Decline of the Century: The Testament of L. Z.* (Czech Republic/Austria, 1993), a personal documentary which exposes his fellow Croats for their Nazi inclinations. Others, who live in the USA, would be glad to make Balkan-themed films but have to stick to various projects that allow them to make a living. Rajko Grlic, a famous Croatian director and member of the Prague Group, teaches at Ohio State University and recently released a tutorial CD-ROM in film production. Lazar Stojanovic, the martyr, who had to serve a jail term in Yugoslavia for his daring *Plastic Jesus* (1971) and who is now based in New York, works as a freelance film researcher. Slobodan Sijan, the author of the classic Yugoslav Gypsy-themed *Who Is Singing Out There?* (1976), works mostly in advertising in California.

DIASPORIC FILMS

Once people migrate, multiple new experiences enter and enrich their lives. Sooner or later they realize that there is more to life than the problems that plagued them back home. It often happens that former enemies end up strolling down the streets of the same city, or enrolling in the same language classes for newcomers. Bosnian and Croat families settle next to each other in Toronto, Kosovar and Serb teenagers frequent the same discotheque in Vancouver. Albeit with various degrees of success, these people gradually realize that they cannot possibly import their domestic disputes into this new territory which is neither theirs nor their adversaries'.

Many of the Yugoslav filmmakers who migrated during the past decade made works that reflected the added dimensions of life in diaspora, and explored how life was going on far away from home. They often chose to deliberately blur the fault lines of ethnic tensions between people who might have been enemies at home, but had now ended up living side-by-side in the West. A body of diasporic films gradually came into being.

The first work was Zoran Solomun's German-made *Tired Companions* (1997), five slightly overlapping stories following the German paths of various refugees from former Yugoslavia. One is the story of two young Bosnian women who strike up a friendship after they are pulled off a train at the Serbian-Hungarian border; in another one two Serbs meet in Germany but find, after a few drinks, that they have little in common and feel better among strangers than together. The director suggests that there is more to migration than endless suffering and that displacement does not need to be interpreted as an unremittantly gloomy experience.

In the U.K., Bosnian-born director Jasmin Dizdar completed *Beautiful People* (1999) shot on location near Liverpool. For the film, he brought together Bosnians and Welsh, Croats and Britons, whose life paths intersect in places like Rotterdam and London. A baby, which is conceived as a result of a war-time rape, is finally accepted by the reluctant mother and named Chaos. The film shows how tired many of the refugees are of conflict, and that in exile there is something more to their lives than homesickness and dreams of return.

In Canada, originally under the working title *West of Sarajevo*, Davor Marjanovic made *My Father's Angel* (1999). The film is set in Vancouver and tells of a Serb and a Muslim who are continuously obsessed with one another, until the moment they realize they need each other's support.

MAKAVEJEV

It is still to be seen if these filmmakers and actors, turned cosmopolitan by the whims of history, will continue working internationally. Given the general trend of globalization, it is very likely that they will further explore the chances, which their expanding universe offers, bravely confronting the misfortunes that may come along.

My prediction is based on the example set by an earlier Yugoslav exile, Dusan Makavejev. The director had already exhibited a cosmopolitan side in his 1971 film *WR: Mysteries of the Organism*, a controversial work that resulted in his emigration to the West. Makavejev's conceptual grasp of an unstable moving world, however, peaked in the 1974 Canadian-French-German funded *Sweet Movie* (1974) a controversial microcosm in which he gathered together a Canadian virgin, a Texan oil tycoon, a Latino singer, an Amsterdam hippie community, a proletarian prostitute, and a sailor called Vakulinchuk (after the protagonist of Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*). For his Swedish-funded *Montenegro* (1981), Makavejev chose a sleazy multicultural Stockholm venue, Zanzi-Bar. For his Australian-funded *Coca-Cola Kid* (1984) he decided on a setting in the Australian outback. *Manifesto* (1988) was produced by Israeli Menahem Golan, made with money from the USA and Yugoslavia, and featured an ethnic mix from the margins of Austro-Hungary. The autobiographical *Hole in the Soul* (1994) was a Scottish BBC production and took place in a variety of locations, from Belgrade to San Francisco.

Makavejev, who underwent the experiences of displacement and exile twenty years ahead of the recent wave of Yugoslav filmmakers tasted cosmopolitanism much earlier. With varying degrees of success he has maintained his interest in the global mixture of localities. In the 1990s, he repeatedly expressed his desire to make a film called *Yugoslavia*. But being considered a maverick in international film circles, he has not managed to secure funding for this project.

ACTORS IN NEW ROLES

The displaced directors from former Yugoslavia are just a handful compared to the actors. Of this last group, some reinvented themselves in the West and started new careers, while others commute between engagements at home and abroad. Croatian Mira Furlan, for example, best-known for her role in Kusturica's Cannes-winner *When Father Was Away on Business* (1985), ended up ostracized in her own country, migrated to the US and made a successful appearance in the sequel to *Star Trek*, *Babylon 5*. Goran Visnjic, first known from his role of the driver Risto in *Welcome to Sarajevo* (1996) got a network appointment as the new pediatrician hired to replace George Clooney's character in the new series of *ER*. The leading star of Yugoslav cinema, Miki Manojlovic, best-known from his roles in *When Father Was Away on Business* (1985) and *Underground* (1995) appeared as the seductive Agostino Tassi in Agnes Merlet's controversial *Artemisia* (1997) and as "the butcher" in an Italian erotic drama by the same name. Macedonian Labina Mitevska, who first appeared as the Albanian girl in *Before the Rain* (1994) and then as a Bosnian girl in Michael Winterbottom's *Welcome to Sarajevo* (1996), was given a role in the next film by Winterbottom, *I Want You* (1998), a love thriller which has little to do with the girl's Balkan origins. She now lives in Oxford, England.

The Yugoslav success story, however, is Rade Serbedzija, who seems bound to become the best-known international actor of Yugoslav origin ever. His international career, which started less than a decade ago, has evolved from low-profile roles in arthouse productions toward leads in more or less mainstream films.⁴ A Serbo-Croat by origin, Serbedzija first appeared in Yugoslav movies in the late 1960s. He has appeared in over fifty feature films by Yugoslav directors. In possession of a handsome, memorable face, Serbedzija has been cast in a large variety of roles—from Josip Broz-Tito in the TV drama *Bombers' Trial* (1978) to a sexually over-ambitious servant in Dusan Makavejev's *Manifesto* (1988). In the early 1990s he became a dissident figure at odds with the nationalist regimes in Yugoslavia and Croatia and left the country. He spent his first few years abroad in London, a period during which he worked on his best-known role—of the weary Macedonian expatriate, the photographer Aleksandar, in the Macedonian-French *Before the Rain* (1994). Soon thereafter, he was cast as a macho Croatian father in the New Zealand immi-

2. The politics around the film *Underground* stirred an international controversy, which I have discussed and evaluated in a detailed separate study. See Jordanova, Dina. "Kusturica's *Underground* (1995): Historical Allegory or Propaganda." *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and TV*. Vol. 19, No. 1, 1999, pp. 69-86.

3. *Ravenous* (USA, Antonia Bird, 1999). The film was completed by the British director of *Priest* after Manchevski left.

4. Serbedzija's career follows a pathway similar to the one of the exiled East German Armin Müller-Stahl who gradually became a familiar face of West German cinema (Fassbinder's *Lola*, Holland's *Angry Harvest*), American cinema (Levinson's *Avalon*, Costa-Gavras's *Music Box*), and world-wide (Scott Hicks's Australian *Shine*).

grant story *Broken English* (1996, Gregor Nicholas). He was then a Prague intellectual and Gina Gershon's lover in the USA-German-Czech co-production *Lies and Whispers* (1996, Roger L. Simon). Simultaneously, he was successfully engaged in a number of smaller or larger supporting roles in films made by international directors—from Nicholas Roeg's psychological thriller *Two Deaths* (1995), through Francesco Rosi's Holocaust drama *The Truce* (1996) and Stanley Kubrick's last film *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999). Lately, Serbedzija has been gaining visibility in Hollywood which still avoids featuring his "unintelligible" name in larger print but nevertheless employs him for a wider range of roles, usually of villainous crooks with an articulate East European accent, drunkard's voice, and oily long gray hair. He landed these types of appearances in mainstream Hollywood flicks such as *The Saint* (1997), *Mighty Joe Young* (1999), and *Stigmata* (1999). (For this last film the spelling of his name was changed to "Sherbedgia" in an attempt to make it pronounceable for American audiences.) At the same time, he continued appearing in a number of features made throughout the various post-Yugoslav states. Serbedzija is now split between Hollywood, European co-productions, and a wide range of productions in the Yugoslav successor states. In the year 2000 he is set to appear in the films of several high-profile directors—from Guy Ritchie's *Snatch 2000*, through John Woo's *M:1-2*, to Clint Eastwood's *Space Cowboys*.

DISPERSAL: SUFFERING OR EXCITEMENT

Deterritorialization, exile, journeying, border-crossings, life in diasporas, growing awareness of instability and change, and the feeling of displacement at home are all new experiences for many in the Balkans. Amidst these processes, filmmaking has been producing works that can be considered as representative of two opposing tendencies in the conceptualization of migration and change. One is the continuation of the traditional notion of migration as a condition of endless squalor, duress, and alienation. The other one is the willingness to seek and discover excitement in the new experiences that come along with the dispersal.

Traditionally, Balkan people led a sedentary life. In the Balkan tradition, moving and migrating was thought of as a painful experience. To change places was looked upon as something undesirable, and something that could only bring about harsh confrontations and trouble. Even though groups from the Balkans have been involved in out-of-Europe migrations since the nineteenth century when many resettled in the New World—America, Argentina, Australia,—travelling was mostly done back and forth within the Balkan universe itself, to Asia Minor and the Mediterranean, and to Vienna as the westward limit.

Cinematic works of the past have recorded the troublesome experiences of economic and political migrations. Notably, many of the region's cinematic masterpieces explore the village-city migrations, which radically transformed these traditional societies. These films reflect the personal tragedies triggered by migrations which have led to the abandonment of the countryside and the desertion of traditional communities.

Initially, cinema reflected the involuntary migrations triggered by the break-up of Yugoslavia along the familiar lines of painful and undesirable experiences or along the nostalgic longing for irretrievably lost homelands. In an interview,

Serbian director Boro Draskovic talked of a visit to Norway for a showing of his *Vukovar: Poste Restante* (1994) where he encountered a community of suffering refugees: "They're trying to lead the same life they had in our country. It's so sad, so far away. Even though Norway is a nice country and people are wonderful to them [...] it is so sad that all around the world there are people who escaped from a country that used to be very beautiful."⁵

Gradually, however, the excitement of dispersal starts finding a cinematic expression. Moving around inevitably brings disquieting experiences, but staying in one place was no longer possible for many in the Balkans. A moment came when everyone was on the move, many were displaced and lived in transition. Unlike the older migrations, the new one were accompanied by mass mediation that empowered the migrants to overcome marginalization by imagining themselves as pieces in the mosaic of a diverse, global universe. In the process of changing places, Balkan migrants came across a multitude of other meaningful societies. They recognized the vitality of these other worlds, and engaged in a critical reconsideration of their own past experiences.

For the past decade many citizens of what used to be Yugoslavia underwent the experiences of involuntary migration. In this process of migration, however, they also acquired a chance to think of themselves in new terms. Their marginalized position within the European space was reconsidered in a global context, one in which they encountered other marginalized peoples—the American Southerners, the Maoris, the illegal Mexicans. Such encounters put them at ease with their own inferiority and made them dare imagine themselves as subjects of new, fulfilling experiences. Reconfiguring the space of their own lives, and accepting new localities, allowed them to reject the burden of historical allegiances that they carried from home, to cast away the embedded hierarchies of fortress Europe, and to come up with new visions that permit them to gain control over their disrupted lives. The older localities were lost, but new ones, never heard of before, were validated through the workings of migration, mass mediation, and imagination.

In the new country, with various degrees of success, life goes on. This new existence is not seen as one of deepening alienation but rather as a continuous appreciation of life. *Broken English*, a film from New Zealand, shows the new migrants interacting with their Maori and Chinese neighbors, and integrating within new communities—not within the framework of the upwardly mobile, but by developing their own viable, even if peripheral, networks.

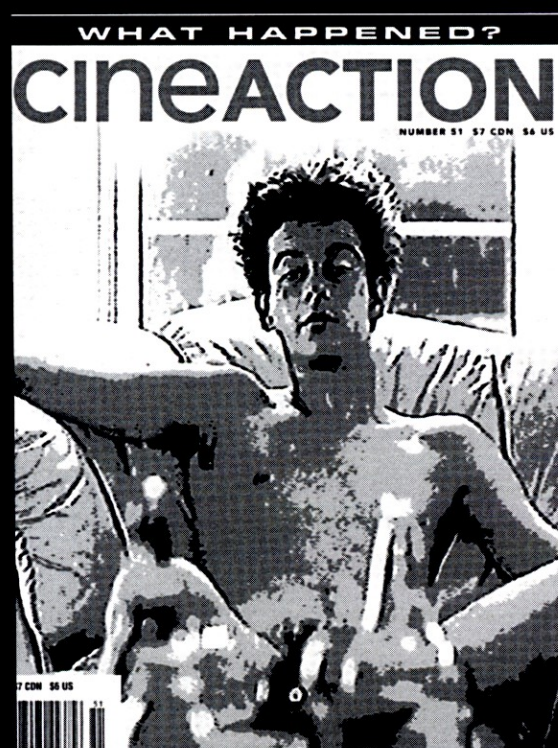
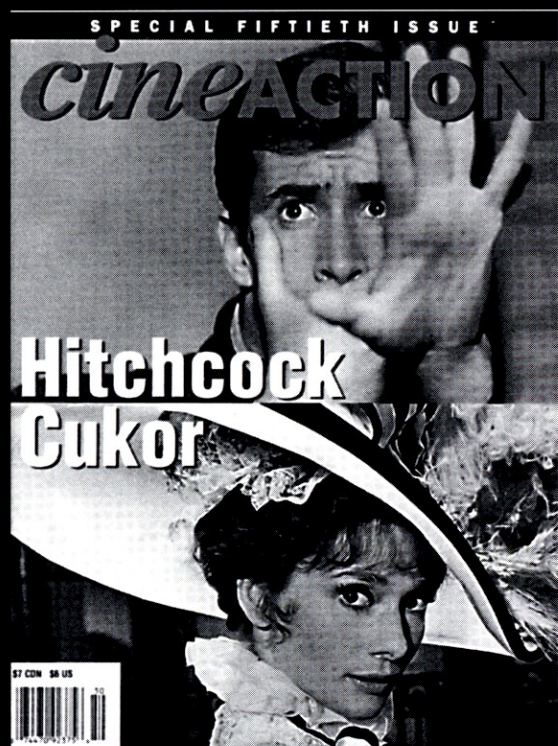
Living in diaspora is part of the general condition of today's world. Registering the experiences of migration in film is also part of a more general trend, where the constant mixing of traditionally isolated spheres pushes many filmmakers into exploring changing places and diasporas-in-the-making. A universe on the move, where old borders crumble and new locales come to replace the old ones, is what today's dispersed Yugoslav filmmaking is trying to grasp.

5. Draskovic quoted by Henry Sheenan, "Vukovar Stirring Raw Emotions: Director of Movie Showing Horrors of Bosnian War Remains an Optimist at Heart," *The Orange County Register*, March 31, 1996, p. F15.

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